The Dissertation Committee for Judith Hazel Howell Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Strange Times:
Dissident Temporalities and the Remaking of History in Contemporary Fiction

Committee:

Elizabeth Cullingford, Co-Supervisor

Heather Houser, Co-Supervisor

Chad Bennett

Martin Kevorkian

Wayne Lesser

Strange Times:
Dissident Temporalities and the Remaking of History in Contemporary Fiction

by

Judith Hazel Howell, B.A., M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2015

To Mom and Dad,

For always reading and always listening,

I am grateful beyond measure

Acknowledgements

This project has benefitted at every turn from generous teachers, mentors, colleagues, and friends. I must first thank my co-directors, Elizabeth Cullingford and Heather Houser, for their unflagging support and guidance. From my first assignment in graduate school, Dr. Cullingford demanded my best scholarship, and this project would not be what it is without her high standards, her incisive feedback, and her kindness. Dr. Houser consistently stretched my thinking and encouraged me to be bold and confident in my arguments and my writing. Both my directors gave freely of their time and their advice, and I am profoundly grateful for all they have done for me. Thanks also to Chad Bennett, who quietly shaped much of this project by asking the right questions and directing me toward the right material, and Martin Kevorkian, whose enthusiasm and graciousness kept me afloat. I thank Wayne Lesser not only for reading my work with a careful and discerning eye but also for thoughtfully advising me throughout my graduate career. Mia Carter continues to provide intellectual inspiration, and I am thankful for her engaging feedback and her generosity over the years.

I am deeply indebted to several peers and friends who read my work with intelligence and care. Without Jenn Shapland and Laura Knowles Wallace, I would still be writing my first chapter. They have seen this project in every stage, and they always read with fresh eyes and new perspectives. Thank you. Laura Beerits, Meredith Coffey, Elizabeth DeMott, and Laura Thain all read sections of this dissertation and kindly offered their insight. Robin Riehl has been my rock, providing me with a constant source

of support and positivity and bringing nuance to my work through her attentive reading. I cannot imagine sitting across from anyone else every day. I am grateful to my best friend and partner Kirk Sisco, who gamely allowed me to pitch chapter ideas and arguments over dinner, pause movies so that I could talk through my thoughts, and use his home as a storage facility for scores of library books. His support for this project, his confidence that I would finish, his patience throughout, and his reminders to have fun have kept me sane and kept me going.

I am lucky to come from a family of brave, smart women. I can only aspire to the grit of Catherine Hall, the creativity of Hazel Hall Howell, the plucky spirit of Jewel English, and the sense of humor and good nature of my beloved grandmother Donna English Walker, the only one of these women whom I knew personally. I hope I have done them all proud. I thank my dear aunt Judith A. Walker for reminding me about the importance of style. Since we were young my sister Kate has served as a model of intellectual rigor and curiosity, and her faith in me, her kindness, and her laughter were a great source of comfort as I worked on this project. Above all, I thank my parents, Thomas and Donna, whose love, encouragement, and support have always sustained me. The most brilliant teachers I know, they inspired me from a young age to love books, to ask questions, and to engage the world enthusiastically. I am filled with more gratitude, love, and affection than I can write here. All that I have ever accomplished or ever hope to accomplish is because of and dedicated to them.

Strange Times:
Dissident Temporalities and the Remaking of History in Contemporary Fiction

Judith Hazel Howell, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Co-Supervisors: Elizabeth Cullingford and Heather Houser

This dissertation argues that a cluster of contemporary novelists experiment with temporalities in order to challenge the still-dominant Enlightenment view that history moves forward in a linear progression. In directing critical attention to the temporal representation of history in recent fiction, I trace a shift in contemporary preoccupations *away* from the postmodern concerns about the relationship of history to language, narrativity, and knowability and *toward* the way that temporal adjustment revises historical thinking. I show that a number of contemporary authors eschew the conventional linkages between time and history that normally structure our engagement with the past. Rather than cut the ties between time and history, however, these texts remake them through unusual temporal frameworks.

I develop this argument using three case studies, which demonstrate how a particular historiographical concept—traditionally undergirded by progressivist ideologies—changes under the influence of an unconventional representation of time. Using Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* (2003) and Alan Hollinghurst's *The*

Swimming-Pool Library (1988), I show how queer temporalities, which reject the compulsory rhythms that often govern heteronormative culture, reconfigure archives by considering the inclusion of intentionally falsified documentation. Two works by African American novelists—Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* (1999) and Kiese Laymon's *Long Division* (2013)—feature a temporality I call the unified now, which envisions time as past, present, and future folded together in a single unit. This temporality allows them to remake the idea of futurity by exploring how future hopes for social improvement might be realized in the present. Finally, Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010) and Lydia Millet's *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* (2003) alter the concept of historical scale by considering deep time that requires us to stretch our notion of history from the Big Bang to the death of our planet. They argue that this expansion of scale is the only way to come to terms with humanity's effect on the natural world. I contend that an exploration of these temporal reorientations is crucial to understanding the contemporary historical imagination and to discovering new ways of perceiving ourselves, defining cultural and social progress, and living responsibly.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OUT OF JOINT

On June 17, 2015, Dylann Roof walked into Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and killed nine of the twelve people attending a prayer meeting at the historically black church. Photographs soon surfaced of the 21-year-old holding a Confederate flag identical to the one then flying on the grounds of the South Carolina state capitol building 150 years after the end of the Civil War. In the days that followed Democrats and Republicans alike called for the symbol of the Southern slave states to be removed, and on July 9 the state legislature passed a bill to do so. Roof's hate crime throws into sharp relief the legacy of the past and the force that history exerts in the present. The discussions that followed the shooting—about how to acknowledge, honor, or censure a complicated history—call into question the view held by many scholars that the past no longer receives the critical attention it deserves. Fredric Jameson, for example, lamented in 2013 the "present-day enfeeblement of historical consciousness and a sense of the past" (*Antinomies* 258). But the tragedy in Charleston suggests that, in fact, those living in the present often have a well-developed awareness of history. For many this racially motivated attack on innocent churchgoers brought to mind the 1963 bombing that killed four young girls attending 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and galvanized hundreds of people to join the civil rights movement.

In his eulogy for pastor Clementa Pinckney, one of the victims of Roof's attack, President Barack Obama focused on the lasting effects of history. He called for "an honest accounting" of the "unhealed wounds" reopened by the shootings and renewed attention to "the way past injustices continue to shape the present" ("Eulogy"). At the same time he urged his audience to use those difficult memories for good: "[H]istory can't be a sword to justify injustice, or a shield against progress, but must be a manual for how to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past—how to break the cycle. A roadway toward a better world" ("Eulogy"). For Obama, history is both cause and cure, problem and solution: it has led us to the heartbreaking recent incident, but it may also guide us away from it. Despite the history of oppression symbolized by the Confederate flag, Obama emphasized "the amazing changes that have transformed this state [South Carolina] and this country for the better, because of the work of so many people of goodwill, people of all races striving to form a more perfect union" ("Eulogy"). Obama's speech implicitly asked Americans to consider the legacy of this terrible event in light of history, which he depicted as a narrative of progress. If the bombings in Birmingham led to increased support for the Civil Rights Act, what will be the long-term effects of this shooting? What good might arise from this tragedy?

Without detracting from the power and timeliness of Obama's eulogy, I want to interrogate the concept of history that undergirds it. The President employs a commonly held view of the past that sees history gradually moving toward improvement in society, which over time can achieve perfection or something very close to it—acceptance,

equality, and concern for others. This notion of perfectibility relies on three basic ideas: that time and history march forward; that past, present, and future are distinct entities; and that we have some measure of control over the passing of time and can, therefore, influence the future by our actions today. Obama's widely praised speech emphasizes the appeal of this idea, especially in times of uncertainty and hopelessness. It suggests that even though we may make errors, those mistakes may be *redeemed* in time. But the trouble with these narratives is that they rarely acknowledge how much of the past cannot be redeemed, and they pay little attention to the nuances of history that do not readily conform to these stories of improvement. This dissertation argues that thinking history outside of this rigidly progressivist approach animates a significant strand of contemporary fiction. I show that many authors are searching for alternative historical models through narrative experiments with what I call "dissident temporalities," temporal models and orientations that challenge the dominant view of time exemplified in Obama's eulogy, a view that underlies most academic and popular discourse about history.[1]

The chapters of this dissertation examine a cluster of contemporary voices, both well established and up-and-coming, that employ dissident temporalities to produce historical models that will likely strike readers as counterintuitive. I show that Don DeLillo, Alan Hollinghurst, Kiese Laymon, Lydia Millet, Monique Truong, and Colson

---

[1] I borrow the phrase "dissident temporalities" from Paul K. Saint-Amour, who uses it in passing in his recent book *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (29).

Whitehead eschew the conventional linkages between time and history that normally structure our engagement with the past. These linkages have become so ingrained that it can be difficult just to think of time and history as separate concepts. We often envision time as empty, a blank space onto which we project our lives, our stories of the past, and our hopes for the future. In fact, that view emerges from a set of assumptions that are by no means irrefutable although they are widely accepted as true. Historian Lynn Hunt articulates the characteristics of time that we take as axiomatic: it is (1) universal, applying equally to every person; (2) unidirectional, moving steadily forward; (3) homogeneous, treating each event as equally present and significant; and (4) singular, consisting of discrete moments that cannot be replicated (3-39). Even though our personal experience of time sometimes challenges these assumptions—we rarely, for instance, treat all events in our lives as equal—they constitute the dominant approach to history. Because we see time as a continuum, we come to view history in a similar way, believing that it is linear and teleological, developing purposefully over time. This perspective also structures our relationship to the future since the idea of forward progression often nurtures dreams of a better world to come. Although this common view of history has long been under attack, as I indicate below, it remains incredibly powerful, in part because it hews closely to the conventional view of time. Rather than cut the ties between time and history, the texts I gather here seek to remake them. They ask how we might reorient our temporal framework in order to produce unorthodox conceptions of

history and futurity through which we may discover new ways of perceiving ourselves, defining cultural and social progress, and living responsibly.

The six novelists I treat here variously envision the past as a gap or absence, as mashed up and entwined in the present, and as stretched out to a scale so large that it challenges the limits of the imagination. While such temporal-historical models are not new, the authors infuse them with fresh political valences and offer new methodologies for historiographic research and practice. Each chapter shows how a particular concept central to historical thinking changes under the influence of an unusual representation of time. Truong's *The Book of Salt* (2003) and Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988) reveal the way that queer temporality—eroticized time that exists outside of linear narratives—revises our view of archives. Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* (1999) and Laymon's *Long Division* (2013) provide insight into how perceptions of futurity are transformed when we consider that our present is layered with both pasts and futures, a temporal concept that I call *the unified now*. Finally, DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010) and Millet's *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* (2003) suggest that a reckoning with deep, geological time forces us to broaden the scale on which we view history and the place of our species within it.

In each chapter I compare two novels that together present a strong case for both the possibilities and the limitations of the temporal reorientations and historical models they propose. The pairs of novels also provide a sense of the wide range of genres, formal strategies, and modes of representation that might be employed to explore dissident

temporalities, not just by the novelists I consider but also by other contemporary writers. Thus the observations I make here apply to a diverse canon of recent novels that expand the contemporary historical imagination by experimenting with time: Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy (*Oryx and Crake* [2003], *The Year of the Flood* [2009], *MaddAddam* [2013]), Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* (2008), Shelley Jackson's *Half Life* (2006), Ursula LeGuin's *Always Coming Home* (1985), and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) in addition to other novels by the authors in my study like Hollinghurst's *The Stranger's Child* (2011) and Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011). My claims also resonate with a recent spate of counterfactual novels that depict the alternate worlds that would result if major historical events had transpired differently. Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* (2013) imagines what might have happened if Hitler had been assassinated before he rose to power in Germany; Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* (2007) represents a world in which the state of Israel failed rather than succeeded in 1948; and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) describes the spread of anti-Semitism throughout the United States after Charles Lindbergh beats Franklin Roosevelt in the presidential election of 1940. Many believe that the power of these "what-if" scenarios is their ability to engage readers with the near-misses of history. But these novels encourage us to reflect on how the traces of what-could-have-been *continue* into the present. Far from emphasizing the distance between our world and the fictional world-that-never-was, Atkinson, Chabon, and Roth extend my concept of the unified now (discussed in Chapter 2), imagining the present as not only saturated with the

historical past but also containing the ghosts of pasts that never happened. These novels inspire us to confront allegiances and enthusiasms (anti-Semitism, for instance, or violent Christian fundamentalism) that remain latent in society and in official historical accounts. In their attempts to use fiction to *document* such "ghosts," these works, like the texts I treat in Chapter 1, expand our notion of archive.

From this small but significant canon, I focus in particular on six texts that approach history not from its center—hegemonic, heteronormative culture—but from its margins. I define these "margins" partially in terms of racial and gender identities by reading both queer novels that include non-normative views of gender and sexuality and African American novels that explore the realities of racial inequality. I also examine the historical imagination of texts focused on the natural world, which is often left out of mainstream historical accounts in the 20th and 21st centuries.[2] Although concern for the environment does not constitute an "identity" like those defined by race and sexuality, it similarly creates a worldview that serves as a distinctive lens through which to view time and history. In this project I put identity-based and ecocritical discourses in conversation with each other, revealing distinctions between them but also recognizing the ways in which they can work together to revise dominant historical narratives and epistemologies.

At the same time that their interest in marginalized histories opens up unconventional approaches, it also makes these authors all too aware of the political

---

[2] Two notable exceptions that provide accounts of human history through the lens of the natural world are Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1997) and Mark Kurlansky's *Salt: A World History* (2002).

stakes of undermining teleological narratives of progress: social and environmental justice cannot be achieved without a commitment to the future and the possibility of improvement that it holds. Even though they recognize that these narratives are unrealistically regimented, inaccurate, and incomplete, they retain an investment in the way that linear, teleological temporalities shape a history that culminates in or ensures their survival as a community. The texts in this study acknowledge this perspective and frequently maintain a tension between what historian Dipesh Chakrabarty distinguishes as "History 1" and "History 2." The former is the traditional linear view of the past established during the Enlightenment, while "History 2" is historical thinking that employs different, often non-Western approaches to time, reason, and history in order to defy the totalizing force of History 1.[3] In *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), Chakrabarty argues that, even with all its shortcomings, History 1 should not be disregarded since it "affords elusive but necessarily energizing

---

[3] Here I am taking Chakrabarty's concepts slightly out of context. In his Marxist analysis, "History 1" is the universal history of capital, which rewrites the past in order to justify and preserve the dominance of capitalism. It searches for precursors and antecedents in order to show that history has always been headed toward capitalism. By contrast, "History 2" denotes practices and epistemologies that resist that view of the past and indicates that we might think history otherwise. Although I am not primarily concerned with undermining capitalist narratives, the logic of capital is certainly at work in the progressive models of time and history that are called into question by the texts in my dissertation. I have found especially useful Chakrabarty's description of the relationship between his two forms of history. He insists that the relationship is not dialectical (that is, moving toward synthesis) but dialogical, with "contradictory points of view" that are "h[e]ld in a permanent tension" (*Provincializing* 254). History 1, which relies on many of the "universal themes of the Enlightenment," is constantly modified by History 2s, a number of approaches that recognize "the diverse ways of being human" (70). Similarly, I suggest that the approaches to the past presented by my novels do not wholly repudiate progressivist narratives but supplement, broaden, and interrupt their account of history to incorporate different worldviews.

glimpses" of "the Enlightenment universals. As moderns desirous of social justice and its attendant institutions, we . . . cannot but have a shared commitment to it" (254, 250). At the same time, we should encourage "the ongoing modification of History 1 by History 2s" (251). Allowing different versions of History 2 to both supplement and "interrupt" dominant views of history, we can productively expand historical thinking (66). The temporal-historical visions I analyze here consider how we might reconceive political success even as they recognize the value of progress traditionally defined. Their different perspectives lead them to suggest that political action and community survival might entail embracing not historical milestones but lacunae in the historical record, lingering in the present rather than focusing primarily on the future as the place where hope resides, and aligning with planetary rather than human history.

History as Literature, Literature as History

By using contemporary novels to theorize an expansion in historical thinking, I contribute to the vast body of criticism that has investigated the relationship between history and fiction in the 20th century. The idea that literature can influence historical thinking has not always been accepted by literary critics, historians, and philosophers of history even though the ancient Greeks considered both literature and history to be rhetorical arts. That notion fell out of favor in the 18th century, which saw the ascendance of scientific inquiry during the Enlightenment and the attendant Romantic belief that literature is a mythic, sacred body of texts (Gossman 229). Alienated from literature by

the Romantics, who wanted to distinguish their purview from the "empirical world of historical reality" (Gossman 229), history aligned itself with science. Historians became investigators rather than rhetoricians, collecting and interpreting facts using a procedure akin to the scientific method. Although historical truth had once been associated with both reason *and* imagination, in this period it became equated with fact alone (White, *Tropics* 123). The consensus was that, with effort and skill, historians could communicate "what really happened." Skeptical of this approach, some 19th-century philosophers of history acknowledged the difficulties of achieving historical objectivity; nevertheless, they maintained a "generally 'scientistic' orientation" (White, *Metahistory* 45). Their focus led them to conceive of history as progressive, with societies continually evolving into higher forms over time (Elias 11-2). Ansgar Nünning identifies the key concepts of this "positivist historiography" as "objectivity, unity, continuity, causality, and linear teleology" (550).

It was precisely this notion of history—as something close to fact-based science—that was challenged in the late 20th century from several perspectives. One attack came from structuralists and poststructuralists who argued that all reality is mediated by language. Encapsulated in Jacques Derrida's famous phrase "there is nothing outside of the text," their approach had serious ramifications for historiography. Roland Barthes, for instance, challenged the concept of a historical fact. In his essay "Historical Discourse" (1967) he contends, "The fact can only exist linguistically, as a term in a discourse, and yet we behave as if it were a simple reproduction of something on another

plane of existence altogether, some extra-structural 'reality.' Historical discourse is presumably the only kind which aims at a referent 'outside' itself that can in fact never be reached" (153-4). In Barthes' terms, history can only approach a "reality-effect" (154); its claim to a reality beyond language is mere pretense.

Historiographers, too, began to question the nature of their discipline.[4] Hayden White argues that historical narratives are nearly indistinguishable from fictional accounts: they are structured according to the style of the individual writer and reveal his or her underlying ideological concerns. Although his argument echoes the poststructuralists' belief that historical reality can be accessed only through language, White was concerned about the effect their theories might have. In his essay "The Absurdist Moment in Contemporary Literary Theory" (1976), he complains that poststructuralists are "metacritics" who usually write about criticism rather than literature. He believes that these theorists have made it difficult for "normal critics" to say *anything* about a text: "In the thought of Bataille, Blanchot, Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, we witness the rise of a movement in literary criticism which raises the critical question only to take a grim satisfaction in the contemplation of ever resolving it or, at the extreme limit of thought, even of asking it. Literature is reduced to writing, writing to language, and language, in a final paroxysm of frustration, to chatter about silence"

---

[4] Although I focus my discussion on White, other historians and philosophers of history that either anticipate or corroborate the substance of his argument include R. G. Collingwood, Arthur Danto, Louis O. Mink, and W.B. Gallie. I refer to White's work not only because he engages most closely with literary criticism but also because his ideas are most influential, consistently cited by contemporary critics.

(*Tropics* 262). Even though he felt exasperated by the kind of critical discourse the poststructuralists encouraged, many would argue that he fostered something similar by ushering in the "linguistic turn" in historiography and urging historians to acknowledge the powerful ways that language mediates our knowledge of the past.[5]

In *Metahistory* (1973), the first of his most influential works, White shows how historians construct history by communicating the "unprocessed historical record" through an ideologically-motivated choice of tropes, aesthetic techniques, and narrative strategies (5). The same facts can produce as many different histories as there are historians. Thus objectivity is an illusion, and much historical knowledge will forever be inaccessible to us. Echoing the ancient Greeks, he believes that history and fiction writing require the same set of skills: "[T]he aim of the writer of a novel must be the same as that of the writer of a history. Both wish to provide a verbal image of 'reality.' . . . [T]he image of reality which the novelist thus constructs is meant to correspond in its general outline to some domain of human experience which is no less 'real' than that referred to by the historian" (*Tropics* 122). In a more recent essay (2005), White seems to contradict his own point by suggesting that writing history and writing narrative are qualitatively different, and he subordinates the former to the latter: "[H]istorical discourse wages [*sic*] everything on the true, while fictional discourse is interested in the real—which it approaches by way of an effort to fill out the domain of the possible or imaginable"

---

[5] "Linguistic turn," a term originally coined by German philosopher Gustav Bergmann, was made famous by the title Richard Rorty gave his 1967 essay collection, *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method.*

("Introduction" 147). Although this point is slightly different than the arguments of his earlier, more well-known works, it does not negate his seminal idea that historians "emplot" history in the same way that writers of fiction "emplot" their stories.

Despite his detractors,[6] White, along with the poststructuralist theorists, successfully challenged the notion of unbiased, objective history and showed that the linear, teleological view of the past was a product of convention and style rather than anything inherent in history itself. Many late-20th-century writers of fiction including Ishmael Reed, Robert Coover, E.L. Doctorow, and John Barth similarly exploded the traditional concept of history. An exemplary text is Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975), which tells the story of three different families in turn-of-the-century New York whose lives intermingle with historical figures like J.P. Morgan, Henry Ford, Evelyn Nesbit, and Sigmund Freud. The novel flagrantly mixes fact with fiction, a strategy evident in the scene in which Booker T. Washington negotiates with a gang of fictional characters that has stormed the Morgan Library, a scene that clearly does not depict any factual account of Washington's life. The effect is that Doctorow's imaginary portrayal of historical figures seems as real and true as the details of the historical record and represents an equation of history with story that epitomizes the postmodern view of history. In her influential book *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), Linda Hutcheon *defines* all of

---

[6] White's equation of history with narrative has been challenged by several critics, perhaps most notably Dorrit Cohn. In *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (1978) and *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999), she delineates the boundaries between history and fiction by defining their formal techniques, narrative elements, and distinctive expectations of the reader.

postmodern fiction by this challenge to objective historical knowledge; she labels this genre *historiographic metafiction* (ix). Connecting trends in literature and historiography, she writes, "In both fiction and history writing, our confidence in empiricist and positivist epistemologies has been shaken" (106). Hutcheon believes that historiographic metafiction participates in a larger postmodern project, a "contradictory enterprise" that questions, challenges, and subverts culture, convention, and ideology at the same time that it is actively engaged in each of them (23). For her, the foremost strategy of postmodernists is *parody*, which "paradoxically incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (11). She argues that works of historiographic metafiction represent historical reality while simultaneously undermining it by self-reflexively acknowledging their own constructedness and "problematiz[ing] the entire notion of historical knowledge" (89). *Ragtime* appears to grant readers access to early-20th-century America even as it consistently reminds them that such access is impossible in its clearly fictionalized scenes.

Brian McHale complements Hutcheon's approach in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) by contextualizing postmodern novels within the canon of historical fiction that begins with Sir Walter Scott.[7] McHale asserts that late-20th-century historical fiction defies three of the genre's defining characteristics: postmodernists are not concerned with

---

[7] Georg Lukács, Harry E. Shaw, George Dekker, and Avrom Fleishman have all provided influential definitions of the traditional historical novel. I will not rehearse them all here, since many other studies have ably done so. For a short but useful review of the literature, see Elias (87-8).

(1) representing the culture of the past accurately, (2) avoiding fantasy and supernatural elements in their depictions of history, or (3) portraying historical figures without violating the known facts of their lives (87-8). In fact, postmodern authors frequently veer from the historical record, crafting their tales in the forms of "apocryphal history, creative anachronism, [and] historical fantasy" (89). Their works emphasize ontological concerns—the difference between real and fictional "worlds"—and reveal "the seam between historical reality and fiction . . . by making the transition from one real to the other as jarring as possible" (90). I contend that contemporary writers have internalized both the postmodern idea that "history itself may be a form of fiction" and many of the narrative strategies that McHale identifies in the era's canonical work (96). However, my readings show that recent writers are using these strategies to different ends. To take one example, McHale suggests that authors of postmodern historical fiction employ anachronism to "flaunt" the fictionality of history and remind readers that the past can be seen only through the lens of the present (93). His example is John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), in which the author ascribes modern ideologies like 1960s-era feminism to characters in the 19th century, creating a jarring juxtaposition that forces readers to acknowledge the way that history is a fiction mediated by the present rather than an objective set of facts to be discovered. In Chapter 2 I show that Laymon uses anachronism in *Long Division* not to draw attention to the fabrication of history but to represent the collapse between past and present in the unified now. No longer primarily compelled by the desire to lay bare the links between history and story, Laymon and the

other authors in this study turn to experimenting with time to challenge orthodox views of history.

While McHale and especially Hutcheon find subversive potential in the postmodern treatment of history, Fredric Jameson can only decry the "loss of historicity" in late-20th-century fiction and culture (x). In his influential *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), he asserts that individual experience from the 1970s onward has become so fragmented that people are unable to situate themselves historically or envisage a totalizing view of history. As a result of this detachment, he argues, fiction "can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about that past (which thereby at once becomes 'pop history')" (25). With such limitations postmodern historical representation inevitably sinks into a politically inert, depthless satire.

In contrast to Jameson's declensionist perspective, Amy Elias convincingly shows in *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction* (2001) that the postmodern belief that we will never know "what really happened" opens up a productive space in which traditional views of history can be challenged. Recasting Hutcheon's concept of "historiographic metafiction" as the genre of "postmodern metahistorical romance," Elias argues that the traditional concept of history—the idea that the past serves "as a situating, grounding foundation for knowledge and truth" (23)—has become sublime in the literary sense, "unknowable and unrepresentable in discourse but profoundly desired" (42). While classic historical novels like Scott's often associated the sublime with a previous culture

or an institution from the past, metahistorical romances associate it with *history itself*. The "historical sublime . . . is the place where history cannot be fathomed at all, or is perceived as a sublime and decentered Absence, in all of its terrifying, chaotic, and humbling incomprehensibility" (56). Elias shows that in their attempts to represent the sublime nature of history, which is denied in traditional historical accounts, the authors of postmodern metahistorical romances invent historical models based on spatial concepts like "flatness, roundness, circularity, and pendulum motion" (105). She demonstrates that these novels, for example, substitute the conventional model of history-as-timeline for history-as-plane with the past, present, and future pressed together into a flattened realm (137-46). This historical model echoes my concept of the unified now, but Elias insists that postmodern authors conceive of history in spatial rather than temporal terms. She believes that representing history through spatial metaphors constitutes a significant way that postmodern authors defy linear, time-based visions of history (104-5). I would point out, however, that history is *always* rooted in time since it is fundamentally a "form of temporal knowledge" (Hunt 96). I show that contemporary writers are refocusing their attention on temporality as a way to revise notions of history. Further, the viability of the spatialized historical models Elias finds in the texts of canonical postmodernism is limited by their reliance on traditional views of history: postmodern authors, she believes, turn to these models only because the historical past they fervently desire remains forever inaccessible.

Turning Toward Time

In directing critical attention toward the temporal representation of history in contemporary fiction, my project offers a sequel to this influential post-45 scholarly work in two primary ways. First, I trace a shift in these texts' preoccupations *away* from the postmodern concerns about the relationship of history to language, narrativity, and knowability and *toward* the way that temporal adjustment broadens historical thinking. To follow the most recent threads in contemporary fiction and to track the successors of postmodern historical fiction, I focus on four 21st-century texts as well as two late-20th-century novels that serve as important transitional works and points of comparison. I suggest that much contemporary fiction that deals with history continues to search for alternatives to the oppressive Enlightenment narrative of progress, but I show that its focus does not lie in revealing this narrative to be inaccessible or subjective but in disrupting the temporal structures that underlie it. As a result these texts present sometimes radical theories of historical time that are best illuminated by close reading and careful attention to novelistic form and structure. For instance, in Chapter 3 I analyze the way that Millet switches between disembodied narration and intense interiority in *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* in order to grapple with two different scales of history, one geologic and one human. I contend that attention to temporal reorientations is crucial to understanding the contemporary historical imagination and to deepening the account of the way that historical time is represented in fiction.

Second, I look beyond the scope of the historical novel, which remains the focus of scholarship on historical representation,[8] to theorize a new dynamic between history and fiction. I am interested in novels that I call "historiographical" rather than "historical" since they reimagine the concept of history without necessarily representing the past itself. For this reason I have not included works like the recent Booker Prize-winning novels *Wolf Hall* (2009) by Hilary Mantel and *The Line of Beauty* (2004) by Hollinghurst. These two texts are chiefly concerned with presenting new depictions of the past: in contrast to many scholarly accounts, Mantel characterizes Sir Thomas More as a villainous historical agent, and Hollinghurst explores the ways that, at the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, participants in London's gay subculture rubbed elbows with the powerful government leaders who publicly attacked their existence. But despite these authors' revisionist tendencies, their novels do not present unconventional models of history or temporality. Like the majority of historical novels, they take a fairly conservative view of time, even if they dramatically rewrite the past. In *The Historical Novel* (1937, trans. 1962), Georg Lukács' definitive exploration of the genre, the Marxist theorist articulates the temporal paradigm that underlies traditional historical fiction like

---

[8] Recent studies that focus on a discussion of the historical novel include Mariadele Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire* (2009); Peter Boxall, "Inheriting the Past: Literature and Historical Memory in the Twenty-First Century" in *Twenty-First Century Fiction* (2013); Samuel Cohen, *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s* (2009); Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (2010); Marni Gauthier, *Amnesia and Redress in Contemporary American Fiction: Counterhistory* (2011); Timothy Parrish, *From the Civil War to the Apocalypse: Postmodern History and American Fiction* (2008); and Alan Robinson, *Narrating the Past: Historiography, Memory, and the Contemporary Novel* (2011).

Scott's. He shows that historical novelists tend to depict progress by representing a historical clash of old and new worldviews, and he praises them for drawing the reader's attention to the same dynamic at work in the present. What interests me, however, is what happens when authors reconceive these historical processes through their experimentation with time. Thus, although a text like Truong's *The Book of Salt* arguably meets the requirements for a historical novel—it is set in the past and includes realistic depictions of the well-known historical figures Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas—most of the six books I analyze in this dissertation do not. For instance, DeLillo's *Point Omega* exhibits a rich historical imagination in its rumination on a stretched-out past that goes beyond human history, but the novel itself is set over the course of a few months in 2006. It is historiographical, then, but not historical. By focusing on texts from several genres, I hope to show the benefits of expanding the critical archive to those novels that serve as historical thought experiments, theorizing conceptions of history meant for readers to think *through*, not necessarily providing historical information or settings like conventional historical novels.

The works in this study are, of course, not the first to use temporality to challenge the entrenched ideas that support linear historical thinking. In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), Walter Benjamin famously criticized the "homogeneous, empty time" of Western history and the widespread view that the present and future make good on the promises of the past through "redemption" (261, 254). In the most well-known passage from his essay, he imagines the Angel of History resisting the positivist

view of forward progress by turning back to face the past, which consists of "wreckage upon wreckage" (257). Although Benjamin himself suggested that his perspective "brush[es] history against the grain" (257), his viewpoint has become widely accepted among literary critics. In the last decade queer scholars in particular have taken up Benjamin's call to resist a progressive view of history. Working across a number of different archives and historical periods, these scholars examine the politics of temporality and argue that linear, teleological time is "straight time." They show how traditional views of time are scripted by "the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing," that have often been denied to or deliberately rejected by queer subjects (Halberstam, *In a Queer* 2). Critics like Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, and Judith Halberstam have turned to the possibilities of "queer temporalities," an umbrella term for a number of unusual approaches to time that defy the compulsory progressivist rhythms of state- and market-influenced straight time and seek to represent the experience of queer subjects who may feel out of sync with dominant culture.

Revealing the ways that non-normative sexualities create temporal dissonances, many of these critics describe how queer approaches to time shift our understanding of both history and futurity. In *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (1999), Dinshaw suggests that instead of leaving the past behind in order to chart progress, we might foster a queer "touch across time" that affirms the desires for connection that bring subjects together without regard to historical periods (3). Other

scholars take an opposite approach, using queer temporalities to advance what some have called the "anti-social" thesis (Halberstam, "Anti-Social Thesis"). Lee Edelman, for instance, suggests that queer subjects are the only ones in a position to resist heteronormative culture's strong commitment to "reproductive futurism," a dedication to the future—symbolized by the figure of the Child—so widespread and unquestioned that it serves as the basis for "every political intervention" (2-3). A world where everything is done "for the children" relies on a concept of reproduction and family from which the majority of queer people have been excluded until recently. In response, Edelman suggests, they should embrace this exclusion, resist all appeals to futurity, and negate the political hope that accompanies those appeals. He believes that rejecting this cultural imperative constitutes "a refusal . . . of history as linear narrative (the poor man's teleology) in which meaning succeeds in revealing itself . . . through time" (4). Edelman intends his provocative approach to counterbalance the attention in gay and lesbian politics to parenting and marriage rights. For him and for other queer scholars like José Esteban Muñoz, the focus on these issues constitutes surrender to "straight time" rather than an embrace of what they see as the politically productive resistance offered by queer time (Muñoz, *Cruising* 21).

While scholarship on queer temporalities has demonstrated the appeal of unconventional approaches to time and the useful ways that they can structure our interactions with the past, what has not clearly emerged is a workable model of history that takes these non-normative temporalities into account. In a trenchant critique of

Dinshaw and others, Valerie Traub observes that much of the work conducted under the rubric of queer time is "interested more in refiguring abstract temporality than in engaging with history or historiography" (34), a complaint echoed even by those who practice the kind of scholarship she criticizes. Elizabeth Freeman, who has theorized a model of history based on "pleasure, specifically, bodily enjoyment" that she calls "erotohistoriography," remarked in a recent essay, "[D]enizens of the contemporary accept the idea of *time* as non-linear and heterogeneous; mixed time is not a crisis. . . . [C]onversely, *historical thinking* still remains a problem: progressive time clearly won't do . . . but how do we encounter history other than through a timeline?" ("Time Binds" 59; "Synchronic/Anachronic"). Her question illuminates what is lacking in both temporalities scholarship and post-45 scholarly accounts that figure history as unrepresentable or unreachable: an alternative method for "encountering history" in a meaningful way that does not fall back into the patterns of traditional historiography. While the postmodernists have taught us to be skeptical of the Enlightenment narrative of history and queer scholars have implored us to resist normative temporalities, they have not provided another way to make sense of the past and to instill hope for the future. The texts I gather here go a long way toward filling that gap by exploring visions of history that seek to inspire hope and (sometimes) political investment without also replicating the dangerous pitfalls of progressivism.

Temporality, History, and Literary Studies

The models that emerge from these historiographical novels not only shift the landscape of contemporary historical representation but also offer a significant contribution to the lively conversation currently taking place in literary studies about the state of historicism, the critical practice which asserts that events, narratives, and ideas may be fully understood only through a rigorous examination of their historical context. Many scholars have expressed concern that this mode of criticism has exhausted itself but that it remains so dominant that no one can envision any other methodology. Critics have variously suggested that the way historicism is practiced now (as opposed to the more polemical New Historicism) flattens a work's context, homogenizing time and place and arbitrarily privileging some discourses at the expense of others; that it too often relies on the authority of the historical record despite well-known critiques that dismiss the idea of historical objectivity; that a focus on context above all else can easily inspire a dangerous relativism that does not allow for politically or morally engaged criticism.[9] A panel at the 2015 Modern Language Association convention featured speakers who were searching for "strong" alternatives to historicism. I contend that my readings produce historical models that point the way toward these alternatives. They reinvigorate the study of the past without falling back into the ruts of historicism by recentering questions about the

[9] The recent collection *The Limits of Literary Historicism*, edited by Allen Dunn and Thomas F. Haddox, provides a good overview of current criticisms of this methodology.

validity of the historical record and by challenging the "apparent naturalness of chronological, linear time" upon which historicism relies (Insko 108).

I find the conversation about the viability of historicism to be severely limited by its obsession with the single issue of whether or not the present is continuous with the past. Historicism traditionally asserts the discontinuities of history: we must place each text or idea within its historical context precisely because that context is foreign to us in the present day. The problem with this perspective, as Jennifer Fleissner points out, is that it easily turns into a form of presentism. By cataloguing all the differences between our present day and the culture in which a certain text was forged, we affirm "the *pastness* of the past" and "the virtues of the present," doing little more than patting ourselves on the back for not being like *that* anymore (Fleissner 702). For Fleissner the only alternative to this methodology is a historical practice inspired by Walter Benjamin that attends to the ways in which the past repeats itself in the present. This critical practice is predicated on finding connections rather than differences across time.[10] Fleissner argues that the way we should encounter history in literature is by analyzing how "a problem [encountered in a text of the past] is still alive and pressing" (703). Rather than declaring the present to be an exact replica of a past situation, she suggests that we should look at the relationship between past and present as repetition with

---

[10] Samuel Cohen argues that historical novels in the 1990s weighed in on the question of historical continuity, and their conclusions, as articulated by Cohen, are similar to Fleissner's. He says that they aim "to explore, through imagination and narrative, the connections between the world that is and the world that was" (27). In doing so they contradict the neoliberal proclamations of the "end of history" that were circulating at the same time.

difference, acknowledging not only the "past's sometimes Gothic grip on the present, but, equally . . . its distance therefrom" (715).

Stephen Best would likely respond that even Fleissner's laudable attempt to prove history to be both continuous *and* discontinuous leaves little room for political agency. In an article protesting the commonplace assumption that "the slave past provides a ready prism for apprehending the black political present," he argues that finding continuities between past and present and using those continuities as a basis for community formation provides shaky ground for political action since it "divest[s] history of movement and change" (453, 454). Best advocates a historicism that recognizes the radical alterity of the past and a critical methodology that treats the past as "falling away" from the present (474). Walter Benn Michaels goes even further in *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (2004) to claim that "the events of the past can have only a limited relevance to the present, providing us at best with a causal account of how things have come to be the way they are, at worst with objects of antiquarian interest" (138-9). In a present filled with poverty and uneven wealth distribution, Michaels says, showing *why* someone is economically disadvantaged is much less significant than trying to address the problem: "The point here is . . . that no one's history need be taken into account, that the recognition of inequality makes the history of that inequality irrelevant, and that the question of past injustice has no bearing on the question of present justice" (166).

While the debate over historical continuity and difference has produced a number of valuable perspectives, I maintain that to narrow our interaction with the past to this

binary is short-sighted: put crudely, the only two options are the past as past and the past as present. The novels in this study present different ways of orienting ourselves towards the past, none of which sit comfortably on the limited spectrum between historical continuity and rupture. Rather than asking about the relationship between past and present exclusively, these texts pose paradigm-shifting questions about the nature of archival material, about whether past and present constitute separate entities, and about the scale of our historical thinking. Each of these concerns has the potential to change the critical conception of history and, in doing so, open up unconventional ways of practicing historicism.

The six novels considered here offer nuanced explorations of the possibilities and pitfalls of various historical methodologies that not only suggest provocative new directions for future scholarship but also bolster exciting work already underway. For example, in a recent article (2013), Jordan Alexander Stein suggests that we might use the version of nonlinear time formulated by queer temporalities as a basis for creating a literary history that pays attention to the "slow, recursive, or minor temporalities" that often tell a different story than ones powered by chronological time (863). He shows that a history of *Moby-Dick* told chronologically emphasizes "publication, obscurity, and recovery" while one organized by queer time highlights the way that the novel circulated in patterns that cannot be charted in a linear way, taking into account, for example, Melville's "minor kind of celebrity" status in London's "urban homosexual subculture" decades after his most famous novel was published (862-3). While Stein envisions a

scholarship based on the queer time I treat in Chapter 1, Paul K. Saint-Amour's recent book *Tense Future* (2015) theorizes a critical methodology based on a version of the unified now that I discuss in Chapter 2. He proposes a scholarly approach focused on "critical futurities" that challenges the traditional view that the future is empty and open. His methodology would "tak[e] as its object past and present conscriptions of 'the future,' the rhetoric, poetics, and ideology of such conscriptions, and their ethical, political and historiographic import" (24). In his study of how the years after World War I were dominated by dread and anticipation of the all-out destruction to come in World War II, Saint-Amour analyzes the possible futures that saturate any present moment (7). While the texts he looks at anticipate total war and thus inspire fear and anxiety, the novels I treat in Chapter 2 find political value in the utopian futures they find at work in the present. Lastly, as an example of criticism that engages with the expanded temporal scales I explore in my final chapter, I would point to the work of Wai Chee Dimock, who has controversially suggested that the scope of American literary history should be significantly broadened so that we might see connections across a vast spectrum of time. For instance, by taking a longer view, we can chart how Henry David Thoreau's ideas about civil disobedience draw on a long tradition of nonviolence that stretches back to the Hindu scriptures and, further, circulated in a wide variety of contexts that exceed the confines of a single culture, area, or nation.

I see the readings that follow as participating in and extending the provocative work undertaken by Stein, Saint-Amour, and Dimock, among others. I believe that our

concept of historicism may be further radicalized by Truong's suggestion that queer time opens up a space for *inventing* a literary archive or by Whitehead's exhortation that we turn our attention to the way that the future is at work in the present rather than focusing solely on the possible futures from some moment in the past, as Saint-Amour proposes. At the same time my texts articulate important caveats for these distinctive approaches to historicism because they imaginatively remind us of the political and cultural stakes of altering the traditional temporal-historical schema: we sometimes *need* a clear chronology, an official historical record, an open future, and a history pitched to the human rather than the geologic scale. Furthermore, this project does not advocate any single concept of history or historicism, as the scholars cited above do, for fear that a one-track approach may simply replace one dominant model with another. Instead, I want to emphasize the *plurality* of methods we might employ to challenge the long-held tenets of historicism.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter 1 I argue that Truong's *The Book of Salt* and Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library* present versions of queer time that point us toward omissions in the historical record that emerge from heteronormative culture's failure to recognize queer sexuality. In *The Book of Salt*, the narrator Bình refers to these omissions figuratively as "being at sea"—that is, existing in a realm away from the watchful eye of the State where his desires can be realized (190). Similarly, Hollinghurst's protagonist

Will places these historical silences in his "library of uncatalogued pleasure," which exists outside of official documentation (165). Both novels suggest that the gaps in the historical record made visible through queer time can be productively filled with fabricated "facts" that create a pieced-together history that connects isolated and excluded individuals across time. Such an approach, I show, reconfigures conventional notions of archives and historical evidence. Bình, a Vietnamese émigré and chef who works in the home of Gertrude Stein, uses his imagination to invent an archive that links him to both his Vietnamese homeland and Stein's queer social circle by overlooking exploitation and prejudice he finds in both places. While *The Swimming-Pool Library* is sympathetic to Bình's reparative approach to history, it raises concerns that an archival practice like his that seeks to develop erotic connections across time and to provide a sense of belonging may obscure the powerful asymmetries among queer men that are worthy of documentation: differences of class, race, and education levels. Together these novels consider the consequences of adjusting historical thinking and archive making so that they become not solely an investigation into "what really happened" but an imaginative enterprise with the potential to perform political and reparative work.

While the queer time I examine in Chapter 1 describes how non-normative sexualities interrupt our traditional belief in the knowability of history, Chapter 2 challenges the way that conventional histories rely on a clear delineation between past, present, and future. I show how two African American novels—Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* and Laymon's *Long Division*—scramble this fundamental notion by

representing the present as the unified now. This temporality lays the foundation for a political strategy that allows marginalized groups to maintain hope for racial equality in the future without also accepting the corollary, the despair-inducing idea that it is *only* far in the future that these dreams might be realized. These novels encourage readers to fully engage with the present and attune themselves to ways in which the future is already at work now. At the same time, they retain and affirm the more traditional view of the future as an open space that has the potential to be wildly different from anything we can imagine in the present; such a view often animates a commitment to political change. For these authors, I claim, the future is both not yet here and already available to us. In *The Intuitionist* utopian visions of a world transformed physically and culturally by the imaginative efforts of people of color are juxtaposed with the author's suggestion that such a world may be glimpsed in the present and accessed to some extent in the unified now. Its plot concerns the race to develop a cutting-edge elevator, the "black box," designed by a philosopher-inventor who turns out to be a black man passing as white. *The Intuitionist* suggests, on the one hand, that the black box will establish a new method of interpersonal communication and create a completely unfamiliar urban landscape and, on the other, that its innovations and utopian visions of connection across difference are *already* available. *Long Division* explores past and future through a time travel fantasy. Rather than separating past, present, and future into distinct destinations as most time travel narratives do, Laymon blurs these entities and depicts his characters as time traveling within the present. Even so, his characters maintain a sense that their travels can

affect a future that is yet to be determined. I contend that Whitehead and Laymon remake ideas of historical progress through their conception of the unified now. They suggest that, in order to sustain the quest for social justice in the present and to continue to hope for a better future, we must move between linear and nonlinear conceptions of history, lingering and investing in the present without abandoning a forward-looking hopefulness.

While Chapters 1 and 2 probe temporalities inflected by the experience of marginalized groups, Chapter 3 takes up the whole of humanity, exploring how our engagement with the natural world affects our notions of time and history. I discuss how the undeniable, ever-increasing human effect on the Earth's ecosystem has placed us in touch with deep time, the extended temporal scale at which planetary processes normally operate. This temporality inevitably revises our understanding of history, which is mostly concerned with the relatively short period in which human civilizations have been established. To contemplate deep time and recognize the consequences of our actions on the environment, we must "scale up" our historical imagination. I claim that this re-scaling might best be achieved through fiction, showing how two recent novels expand our conceptions of temporality and history through epistemological and aesthetic disorientation that taps readers into the scale of deep time. These novels suggest that widening our historical imagination in order to take into account a variety of temporal scales creates a valuable perspective on human action and exceptionalism that repositions our species and allows us to see ourselves as just one part of a larger ecosystem. Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* reveals that slowed-down temporalities bend our normal sense-

making systems like juxtaposition and cause-and-effect relationships and create a useful cognitive friction that may uncover dangerous errors in judgment and perception. Lydia Millet's *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* revisits the nuclear age to show that the immense power and unthinkable destructive capability of the atomic bomb provides insight into the scale of deep time. Among other important similarities, both the bomb and deep time prompt us to consider human extinction. Just as the force of the bomb was paradoxically horrifying and awe-inspiring, the novel argues, the stretched-out perspective of deep time both terrifies and offers comfort. It provides a way of placing the triumphs and failures of human history and the imminent demise of our species in the context of the universe as a whole and our relative insignificance within it.

We turn to history to explain tragedies like the shooting in Charleston and to measure progress like the Supreme Court ruling on June 26, 2015, that legalized same-sex marriage throughout the United States. Hours before delivering the eulogy for Clementa Pinckney, Obama addressed the nation about the monumental decision, and he employed similar rhetoric in both speeches. Just as taking the Confederate flag down would move us toward "a more perfect union" by denouncing the centuries of racial inequality it represents, the Supreme Court's decision that morning "made our union a little more perfect" by insuring the right of gay individuals to marry ("Supreme Court"). The texts gathered here recognize the appeal of charting progress as Obama does, but they also remind us of the dangers of equating history and time with the process of perfectibility. Ultimately they make a strong case that fiction, in its exploration of

dissident temporalities, provides a rich resource through which we can reconceive both past and future and remake history.

CHAPTER 1

INVENTING ARCHIVES IN *THE BOOK OF SALT* AND *THE SWIMMING-POOL LIBRARY*

The personal life of film star Fae Richards is at odds with the roles she performed in early Hollywood films like *Plantation Memories* and *Jersey Girl*, where she was credited only as "the Watermelon Woman." On screen she played a younger, more beautiful version of Hattie McDaniel's classic "Mammy" from *Gone with the Wind*—a devoted servant to her white employers—but her life off screen defied such stereotypes of black women. She had a romantic relationship with Martha Page, the white director of her films, spent decades performing in lesbian clubs in Philadelphia, and, after her tumultuous affair with Page ended, lived the rest of her life with her lover June Walker. Richards' career paved the way for other black lesbian artists like Cheryl Dunye, who examines the actress's life and legacy in her film *The Watermelon Woman* (1996). The only hitch in Richards' serving as a path-breaker is that she never existed. She was invented by Dunye, who set out to "create [her] own history" by imagining a black lesbian performer who could serve as her ancestor. Unable to see herself as part of the entertainment industry, she dreamed up someone who could create that space on her behalf. *The Watermelon Woman*, filmed in the style of a fake documentary, depicts Dunye's search for Richards and the connection that she imagines developing between them. But the filmmaker went further than simply creating a faux historical figure to serve as the subject of her first feature-length movie. She also fabricated historical

evidence, staging photographs of Richards, hiring actors to play the fictional characters of Page and Walker, and orchestrating scenes from the made-up *Plantation Memories* to demonstrate Richards' onscreen presence.

In this chapter I look at two novels in which queer figures, like Dunye, invent their own histories by fabricating tales of the past and falsifying documentation where necessary. Bình, the narrator of Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* (2003), and several prominent characters in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988) use fiction rather than fact to fill in the silences of history. These silences, the novels show, are created at certain times by oppressive hetero-supremacist culture, which often excludes queer existence from its account of the past, and at other times by queer subjects themselves, who may employ reticence to resist the control and domination that can accompany documentation and legibility. An examination of these two texts reveals what may be gained by expanding our notions of historical evidence to include not only factual material but also fictional accounts that provide what we *need* and *want* to know. What also comes into focus, however, is what may get left behind in this reparative approach to history: a recognition of the powerful asymmetries among queer people and the politically charged value of traditional historical evidence.

The characters in the two novels, like Dunye in *The Watermelon Woman*, share a desire to "feel historical"—that is, to counter the exclusion and isolation that so often characterizes queer existence with "some more encompassing narrative of collective life," as Christopher Nealon describes it, that would help queer individuals feel connected

to each other through a shared past (8). This affective need for history is at the center of a number of projects undertaken in the last two decades by queer scholars who seek to counter the popular rhetoric that characterizes gays and lesbians as possessing "no childhood, no origin or precedent in nature, no family traditions or legends, and, crucially, no history as a distinct people" (Freeman, "Introduction" 162). In their attempt to foster an emotional connection to the queer past, many of these scholars have turned toward alternative temporal schemata that eschew the linearity, teleology, and biological imperatives of "straight time." Carolyn Dinshaw focuses on how we might encounter history through an affective "touch across time," a "queer historical impulse" that can connect "lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then and . . . those left out of current sexual categories now" (3, 1). Elizabeth Freeman makes a case for practicing "erotohistoriography," arguing that "queers survive through the ability to invent or seize pleasurable relations between bodies . . . across time" ("Time Binds" 58). Even Heather Love, who contends that an investigation of queer history will be as much about negative feelings like despair as about pleasure, believes that building relationships with queer figures from the past is crucial to understanding present-day queer identity, which continues to be "disqualified" and excluded in violent ways (4). These approaches advance two primary ideas: that the need to establish a connection to the queer past demands a different mode of temporality and that erotic desire has the power to challenge and transform the way we interact with history.

The Book of Salt and *The Swimming-Pool Library* extend these claims, showing how queer sexual encounters, often disavowed by heteronormative culture, create temporal gaps in the historical record. These gaps are not easily "filled in" with evidence, truth, and facts—at least as they are traditionally defined. Thus, the characters in the novels use these historical lacunae to reimagine the concept of the archive: What kind of archive would emerge if the motivating factor behind its creation were erotic desire and the affective need for history rather than historical preservation? Ann Cvetkovich has suggested establishing a queer "archive of feelings" that consists of uncommon materials gathered to "document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism" and "address the traumatic loss of history that has accompanied sexual life and the formation of sexual publics" (*Archive* 241). However, as Sara Edenheim has recently pointed out, Cvetkovich's archive of feelings looks in practice like a traditional archive, which also contains personal memorabilia, ephemera, and seemingly valueless objects. Scholars working in both kinds of archives similarly "loo[k] for 'feelings and experiences'" in the documents they find and take careful notice of what is missing, for both groups understand that the archive privileges the experiences of the notable and unique rather than the common (44). For Edenheim, queer archives like Cvetkovich's are just as committed to historical recovery and the preservation of knowledge as the conventional archives they seek to challenge. Her response is to suggest that scholars turn with renewed enthusiasm to the "already existing public research archive so scorned by the queer archivists" and read it against the grain (50).

But the two novels I read in this chapter propose a more radical archival practice based on the characters' own theories of queer temporality, which pry open a space in which to invent a fictional archive. Instead of a documented collection that indicates what history *was*, this invented archive communicates what history *should have been*. As such, it has the potential to serve a significant cultural purpose by broadening the definition of the historical record. Dipesh Chakrabarty makes a strong argument for the importance of "dreamed-up pasts and futures" that imagine connection and collectivity and "write over the given and privileged narratives" created by our traditional conceptions of time and history (*Provincializing* 46). He suggests that although fanciful dreams have often been denigrated and dismissed, they contribute to a historical method (what he calls "History 2") that is as valid as conventional historical accounts (what he calls "History 1"). By "documenting" these dreams, I argue, invented archives give us access to History 2, which performs the crucial function of helping us think outside the dominant narratives of History 1. But at the same time that the novels articulate the powerful capability of such archives, they also question a historical practice that is motivated by the erotic desire for connection. These two texts ultimately show that, because of its emphasis on identification and attachment across time, an archive based on affective need can easily replicate the oppressive silences and violent exclusions that it was created to repudiate.

Archives Adrift in *The Book of Salt*

The Book of Salt tells the story of Bình, a fictional Vietnamese queer exile who resides in the Paris household of Gertrude Stein and her lover Alice B. Toklas when their avant-garde interests made them the center of Anglo-American modernism during the 1920s and '30s. Truong was inspired to create this character when she read a passing reference to an "Indochinese cook" in *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*. *The Book of Salt* employs the form of the traditional historical novel, offering a fictionalized version of the famous couple that appears at first simply to supplement the historical record. However, Bình proves to be an elusive and unreliable figure; his story is certainly no bearer of truth. Despite the lyrical, stream-of-consciousness quality of his first-person narrative, he never grants readers full access to his interior life, and as the novel unfolds, he admits to fabricating parts of his life story that he had presented as true. In the final pages of the book he reveals that *Bình* is not even his real name: "I never meant to deceive, but real names are never exchanged" (243).

He explains his shiftiness as a consequence of being a queer immigrant in Paris. Keeping secrets, he informs readers, is his way of protecting himself from exploitation. Applying for work as a chef, he declines to provide a complete job history because he associates official documentation with the oppressive colonial and religious culture he seeks to escape. He recalls that his potential employers were often frustrated by his reticence: "Three years unaccounted for! you could almost hear them thinking. . . . As long as Monsieur and Madame can account for my whereabouts in their city or in one of

their colonies, then they can trust that the République and the Catholic Church have had their watchful eyes on me" (17). By contrast, to be off-the-grid and out of the reach of the historical record, as Bình was for three years, is to resist the power of that "watchful eye." But it is also to identify himself as queer, as he explains: "[W]hen I expose myself as a subject who may have strayed, who may have lived a life unchecked, ungoverned, undocumented, and unrepentant, I become, for them, suspect. Before, I was no more of a threat than a cloistered nun. Now Madame glares at me to see if she can detect the deviant sexual practices that I have surely picked up . . ." (17). Both Bình and his potential employers, then, eroticize the gaps of history, associating the blank spaces in Bình's life story with sexual deviancy. Bình's refusal to be documented also entails a resistance to the Parisians' exploitative desire to hear about "the fruits of exile, the bitter juices, and the heavy hearts" that are part of his experiences (19). He realizes that he is only one in a long line of "wounded trophies" who have satiated their "taste [for] the pure, sea-salt sadness of the outcast whom they have brought into their homes" (19).[11]

While many scholars would likely see his employers' attitudes as an example of the violent erasure of queer people from the historical record and the potentially harmful association of queerness with negative experiences like sadness and despair, Bình sees it as an opportunity to think outside traditional conceptions of time and history. Since his

---

[11] Investigating the novel's use of food and food metaphors, Denise Cruz reads the job interviews as an example of Western "consumption of the colonized Asian body" (357). In their analyses of *The Book of Salt*, Wenying Xu (141) and Norman W. Jones (108) both analyze such consumption—and its attendant overtones of cannibalism—more thoroughly.

status as a queer émigré allows him to stand apart from official history, from family, from colonial domination, and from heterosexuality, Bình inhabits a different kind of time, an alternate orientation he refers to as being "at sea." The phrase partly refers to his physical location: he spends many years aboard freighters, serving on a ship during the three years he refuses to discuss with his prospective employers. Michelle Peek points out that in *The Book of Salt* the sea occupies a "sort of liminal zone of time and space (and of recorded history) with room for different bodies and different orientations" (7). But it is also more than that: echoing the Parisians' association of the unknown areas of history with deviancy, Bình uses "at sea" to refer to a realm of sexual ecstasy. When Bình's eyes first meet those of Marcus Lattimore, who becomes his lover, he describes the sensation as "[w]aves . . . coursing through my veins. I am at sea again" (37). And when Lattimore invites Bình to dine alone with him, the cook thinks, "I am at sea again. Not the choppy, churning body that bashes open a ship's hull like a newborn's soft skull. Yes, a sapphire that a ship's bow skims and grooves" (104).[12] For Bình being "at sea" means existing in an erotically charged temporal mode.

This queer temporality stimulates Bình's imagination, granting him access to a realm of fantasy:

---

[12] David Eng suggests that the fact that Bình and Lattimore, a biracial man passing as white, are "at sea" with each other evokes "the epistemology of the oceanic, shifting our attention to the sea as history" (72); these two men forge a connection because both are minority subjects with historic ties to the sea as a route for slave and migrant labor. I would argue, however, that the "at-sea" intimacy that brings the two men together obscures the way in which Lattimore mercilessly exploits Bình, a point I will return to later in this chapter.

> Time for me had always been measured in terms of the rising sun, its setting sister, and the dependable cycle of the moon. But at sea, I learned that time can also be measured in terms of water, in terms of the distance traveled while drifting on it. When measured in this way, nearer and farther are the path of time's movement, not continuously forward along a fast straight line. When measured in this way, time loops and curlicues, and at any given moment it can spiral me away and then bring me rushing home again. (190)

"At sea" time acts unusually and is not calculated by commonly accepted methods. Bình's connection to the water helps him experience time as neither linear nor circular but something much more unstable, "curlicues" that can in the same moment summon him away from the present, draw him into the past, and deposit him into the future. His description hews fairly closely to scholars' accounts of queer temporality. Annamarie Jagose, for instance, defines it as the "recursive eddies and back-to-the-future loops" that defy the progressivist schema of straight time (158). Like these scholars, the novel shows that this nonlinear, noncausal, plural sense of time is *queer*, a product of "subjugated or disavowed erotic experiences" (Freeman, "Introduction" 159): Bình only arrives at this alternative mode of temporality because he is forced to leave Vietnam after an illicit sexual encounter with the French head chef at the Governor-General's house in Saigon is made public. His physical and psychic access to the "sea" is only made possible by his participation in nonnormative sexual acts.

Bình uses his queer sense of time and his attention to what lies outside the documented historical record to tell stories that rectify his experience of exclusion. He explains that his talent for imaginative vision is also what makes him excel at his job: "[T]o be a good cook I had to first envision the possibilities. I had to close my eyes and see and taste what was not there. I had to dream and discern it all on my tongue" (66). When Bình does not know (or does not *want* to know) the facts of an event, he turns with delight to his imagination as he and his mother used to do. Together they would reinvent stories they heard, like the story of Father Augustine, a Vietnamese priest who traveled to Rome, received a blessing and a gift from the Pope, and died abroad. Since Bình and his mother did not like the ending—and since neither respected the Catholic Church enough to accept its version without question—they invented their own: "My mother and I felt free to improvise because we did not attach to Father Augustine's story the religious significance that Vietnamese Catholics did" (165). Like his queerness, his irreverence, his complete disregard for the official record, allows Bình to think outside of traditional narratives in order to tell stories that end happily.

Indeed, stories are what *protect* him from the harsh realities of the past; his impulse to create is reparative. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that reparation arises from loss and pain but, rather than dwelling in them or repeating them, moves beyond them to build a more sustaining relationship to the world. A reparative reading practice, she says, would be able to take a "sinister book" and, by loving it, "generate out of concentrated meditation on its pieces a different and *needed* book" ("Introduction" 278,

emphasis added). This is precisely the process that Bình performs in *The Book of Salt*. He rewrites the "sinister book" of his past to create new stories that sustain him. Instead of coming to terms with a father so cruel that he expelled his son from his homeland, for example, Bình invents a "real" father, a "scholar-prince" with whom his mother had a brief but passionate affair: "Whose version of this story should I believe? That my dear mother had a lover, who was her scholar-prince if only for a short while . . . . Or that the Old Man is my father and that in spite of that fact he stood in front of his house . . . and he lied to me" by insisting that Bình was not his biological son (229-30). He also changes the ending of another painful story: the loss of the last gift his mother gave him before he left home. When Bình and Bão, his friend throughout the sea voyage, arrive in France, Bình discovers that his friend has stolen the red pouch his mother sneaked to him with all the gold leaf she had been able to save. Bình imagines how the theft would have upset her: "Má, please do not cry. I know I could have bought bread with it, a room for the night" (242). He considers Bão's betrayal "an unsatisfying and unbearable ending" (242), so he makes up a new conclusion: "[T]he saga of the red pouch, for me, never ends there on the docks of Marseilles" (242). In his imagination Bão returns to Vietnam and gives the gold leaf to Bình's brother, telling him that "Bình wanted her to have it back" (242). Bình's stories "never end" in a place of pain and loss; he always modifies and extends them into the present, where they serve to nourish him.

Nowhere are Bình's imaginative talents and his desire for reparation more apparent than in the brief episode in which he encounters a stranger whom he calls the

"man on the bridge." Not until the end of the novel does Bình learn that his name is Nguyễn Ái Quốc, which only the most informed readers will recognize as one of the many aliases of Ho Chi Minh, who eventually became the leader of the Vietnamese nationalist movement. The two meet by chance on a bridge before Bình begins working in the Stein household. They quickly build a rapport, eat dinner together, and, Bình implies, have sex. The stranger announces that he has plans to leave the next day, and the two never see each other again. The scenes featuring Ho Chi Minh form the center of David Eng's masterful reading of Truong's novel in *The Feeling of Kinship*. Eng believes that the "fleeting liaison" Bình has with his famous countryman "confounds the domain of historical understanding" because the "scandalous, perhaps unthinkable, desire" between the two men is an affront to the established historical record (62). All of the details the man on the bridge offers about his life are in line with biographies of the revolutionary (Xu 145-6), but the suggestion that Ho Chi Minh had an affair is shocking not only because his partner is male but also because the sanctioned narratives of Ho's life often imagine him as a celibate, ascetic leader who eschewed personal romantic relationships (Quinn-Judge 1-2, 6).[13] Eng sees this radical contradiction as part of the

[13] Truong states in an interview that her book has not been translated into Vietnamese because of the appearance of Ho Chi Minh and her intimations about his sexuality, which would violate the country's reverence for the Communist leader. She also believes that the scene is partly responsible for the popularity of her book among Vietnamese Americans, who would normally boycott any work that even mentions Ho: "I feel like I didn't get a lot of that criticism because, for a very conservative, hardcore Vietnamese-American, if they see that I'm suggesting Ho Chi Minh was a gay man, they think of it as a criticism, an insult to him. And that's why they haven't been saying I'm a Communist" (Yi-Sheng).

book's strength: "Through the irruption—indeed, the interruption—of queer desire, Truong stages the emergence of an alternative historical time and space discontinuous with the sanctioned historical development, conventional historical narratives, and authorized historical representations of this hallowed revolutionary hero" (64). By identifying the man on the bridge obliquely, Eng contends, the novel avoids the question of "Did Ho Chi Minh *really* sleep with men?" and opens up a "tear in historical time" that creates "an epistemological space for a consideration of the unknowable and unthinkable" since the liaison is "possible albeit unverifiable" (64). However, my reading shows that Bình provides clues that he has deliberately fictionalized his encounter with Nguyễn Ái Quốc, just as he creates a fictional father figure in the "scholar-prince." Building on Eng's insightful claim that Bình and Ho Chi Minh's brief connection "preserves room for thinking the what-could-have-been in the what-can-be-known" of the traditional historical record (65), I suggest that we focus our attention on the ways in which Bình tries to *document* the what-could-have-been (but was not) in an attempt to create a reparative archive of belonging.

One indication that the scene with Ho Chi Minh is deliberately fabricated is its setting along a misty river. Bình associates mist-covered bodies of water not only with myth but also with lies that comfort him and make him feel desired and loved. Just a few pages before this imaginary encounter, Bình discusses his preference for this setting in his invented stories: "Some things are classic and should never be changed. Mist, as I had learned from my mother's stories, allows unlikely lovers to meet and forbidden subjects

to wander the land. In my stories, the lakes are in a perpetual state of mist or under heavy cover of ocean-borne fog" (82). Bình also connects a romantic setting with stories that console him: "I lie to myself like no one else can. I always know what I need to hear. What else am I to do, revert to the truth and admit that I am a twenty-six-year-old man who still clings to the hope that someday his scholar-prince will come? Will hear my song floating over a misty lake, fall in love with my voice before ever laying eyes on my face" (80). Bình sets his encounter with his own "scholar-prince" on a day when "there was a mist rising from the Seine" (85), signaling to readers that he has entered the fantastical realm of his mother's stories. Further, they meet on a bridge, a liminal space of possibility and connection between two banks of terra firma.

A second indication that this story is made up is the fact that "the man on the bridge" is initially introduced to readers as a figure in one of Bình's recurring fantasies. Jobless and wandering, the cook finds himself on the bridge imagining a conversation. "'What keeps you here?' I would hear a man asking. Your question, just your desire to know my answer, is what keeps me, has always been my response. I would then see him smile. I would open my eyes, and I would leave this bridge for the night" (85). The man appears to be simply a figment of Bình's imagination until he narrates the story of their only meeting. Because he begins his recollection of their encounter with a ghostly presence who disappears before his eyes rather than the flesh-and-blood man with whom he supposedly spent one night, Bình gives the impression that the man on the bridge is a fantasy come to life. As the unknown figure and Bình exchange information about

themselves, the man's mythical status is reinforced. It turns out that Bình has already heard legends about his talent as a letter writer and his unique ability to guess a person's exact age. Bình himself can hardly believe that their rendezvous actually happened: his narration is evasive and suggestive rather than explicit. It takes place, he says, in "lost" time—time filled with magical possibility that escapes documentation (99). We might say, then, that his rendezvous with Ho Chi Minh takes place "at sea," in a gap opened up by queer desire that falls outside the historical record.

The fact that Ho immediately offers Bình several connections to his homeland, from which he has been violently separated, serves as the third indication that the encounter is the imagined product of Bình's desires rather than his memory. The dress and language of the man on the bridge are "undeniably Vietnamese" (86). When Bình says that he has no family left in Vietnam, the man is "visibly moved by the idea of me alone" (93). He takes Bình to a restaurant where he eats food that reminds him of the tastes of home: "Watercress is unmistakable, bitter in the mouth, cooling in the body, greens that any Vietnamese could identify with his eyes closed" (97). Finally, the name that Bình attaches to this figure years later—Nguyễn Ái Quốc—is closely associated with Vietnam: *Nguyễn* is an common surname there, Bình tells readers, and *Ái Quốc* means "patriot" (247). He calls it "a fine name for a traveler to adopt, . . . a traveler whose heart has wisely never left home" (247). Despite his strong ties to Vietnam, the man convinces Bình to stay in Paris and stop working on ships. And, later, when Stein and Toklas ask

Bình to accompany them to the U.S. he refuses, citing his connection to the city where the fantastical man on the bridge resides:

> I wanted to see him again. But the man on the bridge did not tell me where he was traveling to, and the world was too vast for me to search for him, I thought. The only place we shared was this city. Vietnam, the country that we called home, was to me already a memory. I preferred it that way. A 'memory' was for me another way of saying a 'story.' A 'story' was another way of saying a 'gift.' The man on the bridge was a memory, he was a story, he was a gift. Paris gave him to me. And in Paris I will stay, I decided. Only in this city, I thought, will I see him again. For a traveler, it is sometimes necessary to make the world small on purpose. It is the only way to stop migrating and find a new home. After the man on the bridge departed, Paris held in it a promise. It was a city where something akin to love had happened, and it was a city where it could happen again. (258)

Using their imagined meeting, Bình constructs a story that explains his reasons for settling in Paris. He conjures up an encounter that can reconnect him to Vietnam, give him a sense of belonging and safety in Paris, and close the distances of time and space in order to make the world feel smaller. Bình's linguistic equation here summarizes his reparative approach to the past: memory = story = gift. Something that supposedly "really happened" is actually something made up which turns into something that is meant to please.

But Bình is not content for his encounter with the man to reside only in his imagination; he also presents the reader with a kind of "proof" that it occurred. When he goes to retrieve portraits he made with Lattimore, he finds a salt print in the photographer's studio that he believes shows the man on the bridge. The photographer explains that the man used to work for him as a photograph retoucher and gives Bình his name. Although the cook offers to trade his pictures with Lattimore for the one of the man on the bridge, the photographer refuses because the salt print is valuable (246). The filter on the photograph shows the man on the bridge "awash in storm water blue," a phrase that takes him out of the realm of historical reality and once again places him in the misty sea of fantasy. It seems likely that Bình has attached his imagined encounter to a real photograph of Nguyễn Ái Quốc. He admits his own uncertainty: "When I think now about the man on the bridge, I waver. Most of the time I am certain, and there are times when I think, No, he was just a man like all the others" (91). The fabricated narrative with the mythical man on the bridge becomes *tangible* in the photograph, which serves as a pictorial archive that "proves" Bình's story. By focusing on Bình's archival impulse, I challenge Eng's claim that the novel presents a "queer time and space outside teleological histories of state and family . . . [that] lack[s] . . . documentary intent" (64). I suggest, by contrast, that the novel is in fact chiefly concerned with exploring what kind of "documentation" might be produced in the realm opened up by queer temporality.

Roland Barthes suggests that photographs always authenticate the existence of the past they represent; he calls it their "ça-a-été" ("having been there") quality (*Camera* 76-

7). Indeed, *The Book of Salt* uses photographs throughout to verify its account of history. The novel opens with a description of a photograph of Stein, Toklas, and Bình that indicates its historical setting and gives the impression that it will supplement the facts of Stein and Toklas's life that have already been entered into the historical record. Similarly, Bình describes the photograph of Ho Chi Minh to lend credence to his fictionalized history. Marianne Hirsch emphasizes the historical power of the medium: "When we look at photographic images from a lost past world, especially one that has been annihilated by force, we look not only for information or confirmation, but also for an intimate material and affective connection" (116). As we will see in *The Swimming-Pool Library*, photographs are a particularly rich medium for an invented archive because they offer what appears to be a straightforward representation of reality and also stimulate an emotional "touch" across time.

The encounter with Ho Chi Minh is not the only story Bình fictionalizes; he also deploys his well-developed imagination in the Stein-Toklas household. He recounts scenes that he could not have witnessed and reveals thoughts and feelings that he could not have discovered because of his poor language skills. For example, he relates as fact the scenes of Toklas' departure from her native San Francisco and her arrival at Stein's door in Paris. He purports to enter her consciousness: "There was life before [Stein,] but Miss Toklas had not lived it . . . . She had to travel thousands of miles from home to escape the setting sun. She thought she was giving in to her instinct to flee, a fear so animal-like that she submitted willingly. Now she remembers it as a homing instinct, a

flight toward as opposed to away" (158). He cannot possibly know the circumstances that brought Toklas to Stein decades ago since he has only been in their service for five years, and yet he imbues her experience with his own desire for belonging.

Many of these imagined scenes concern moments when one of the women defies heteronormative expectations. He pictures the physical "transformation" of Stein that took place when she cut her "massive topknot" into a mannish style of "closely cropped hair" (28-9). He imagines that her poetic style is inspired partly by the spare masculine décor of a mechanics' garage that she visits on occasion (183). And he discusses the blossoming of her artistic talent, which overshadowed that of her brother Leo and led to their estrangement (207-8). He even narrates her sexual awakening: "Gertrude 'Gertie' Stein, twenty-nine and almost two hundred pounds, was in love, and she mistook it for a disease" (205). Such narratives are not meant to present facts; their purpose is to relay the origin story of a queer community that includes Bình.[14] He understands that he does not *completely* belong to the Stein-Toklas household, which revolves around the famous and fascinating people in the couple's inner circle. Nevertheless, he feels at home there: "I have been given my own set of keys. . . . . I have been given a room to call my own. I

---

[14] A similar theme is at the center of Truong's other novel, *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010). In the novel's final lines, the narrator Linda reflects on the possibly-untrue story her adoptive mother has just told her about her biological family: "I had thought . . . that she could be making this all up. I decided that it didn't matter. At least it was a story, I thought. We all need a story of where we came from and how we got here. Otherwise, how could we ever put down our tender roots and stay" (282). In her reading of the novel, Amanda Dykema points out that this passage indicates that the narrator "prefer[s] aesthetic representation . . . to any archiving impulse that might produce factual truths" (125). I argue that the same is true for Bình.

have slept soundly, dreamed deeply, inside it. I can imagine my Mesdames waiting here for me from the very beginning" (26). One of the ways Bình measures his integration into the household is that he can *imagine* that Stein and Toklas saved a place specifically for him. He uses that imagination to create a world for himself—a world of outcasts, travelers, and excluded queer subjects. Bình's relationship to the past that he invents is what Nealon calls "foundling" because it entails both "an exile from sanctioned experience" and "a reunion with some 'people' or sodality who redeem this exile and surpass the painful limitations of the original 'home'" (1-2).

However, by inventing an archive that documents this community of dissidents, Bình smoothes over the powerful race and class distinctions between himself and his female employers that the novel takes pains to point out. One of the surprises in *The Book of Salt*, as many critics have noted, is its negative portrayal of Toklas and "GertrudeStein," whose first and last names Bình always conjoins. Even though they are themselves queer subjects—Eng calls them the "poster children for queer liberalism" (74)—they take advantage of their power over their chef. On one occasion Toklas asks Bình to repair Stein's shoe, the strap of which has broken while the pair is being photographed. Underlying this request, he understands, is Toklas' refusal to "have photographs of *me* prostrated before her in that way" (255). Bình also notes Stein's misogyny. She prefers male company and relegates her female guests to the kitchen because "wives are never geniuses. Geniuses are never wives. GertrudeStein, therefore, has no use for them. . . . [W]ives are comforting, comfortable, and often someone to be

comforted. They are amusing in small doses, distracting even, especially when their shapely legs arrive at the rue de Fleurus" (184).[15]

In addition to mentioning the misogyny at work in their relationship, Bình suggests that Stein and Toklas are also deeply racist even though they often invite people of color into their home. After Paul Robeson's visit Stein cruelly mocks his accent, and Toklas giggles, "Lovey, stop! You sound like a shoeshine boy" (188). Curious about the racial identity of their guest Marcus Lattimore, the two encourage Bình to cook for him on Sundays (Bình's weekly day off) so that he can discover the truth. In an imaginary conversation with Lattimore, Bình admits: "Miss Toklas intended that I be an offering to you, a little mouse who could enter your kitchen, invited but otherwise unnoticed. . . . 'Is Lattimore a Negro?' is what they, in the end, want to know. My Mesdames tell me that they just want to be absolutely sure" (189). As Y-Dang Troeung argues, the novel "goes to great lengths to explore . . . the inequalities . . . that exist within queer communities as a function of race and class" (122). However, I contend that, although Bình often comments on these distinctions in his first-person narration, his *imaginative* life—driven as it is by his desire for a reparative relationship with the world around him—affirms

---

[15] Scholars are divided about the politics of Stein's gender performance in the novel: Wenying Xu suggests that Stein and Toklas unfortunately adhere to stereotypical patriarchal roles that render their relationship heteronormative rather than transgressive (160), while Chris Coffman argues that the women "play with sharply distinguished gender roles" in a subversive way that "exposes the way all gender is open to resignification" (173n4). Coffman is certainly right about Toklas, whose subordination to Stein is also the source of her power, but the novel never justifies or excuses Stein's chauvinism. The diverse readings of their relationship in the novel reflect debates about the dynamics of their real-life partnership. See Linzie 1-19 for a helpful review of the critical conversation on this issue.

queer community and belonging above all and deemphasizes the inequalities at work in his role as a servant to the two women.

The juxtaposition of two scenes illuminates this point further. At one point Lattimore, whom Bình calls "Sweet Sunday Man," convinces the cook to steal one of Stein's manuscripts from her home. Bình comes to realize that Lattimore's obsession with his employer's work and her celebrity is the only reason that he showed interest: "I am in the center of a hive, and it is Sweet Sunday Man who is the persistent bee. The honey that he craves is the story that he knows only I can tell" (149). Called *The Book of Salt*, the manuscript he steals turns out to be a character study of the cook himself; Stein's appropriation of Bình's story alludes to her genre-bending work *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, which she wrote in the voice of her lover. While Bình cannot read English and thus does not know what Stein says about his life, he is furious that she has taken advantage of him. Although he is never outwardly confrontational, Bình thinks to himself, "I did not give you my permission, Madame, to treat me in this way. I am here to feed you, not to serve as your fodder . . . . You pay me only for my time. My story, Madame, is mine. I alone am qualified to tell it, to embellish, or to withhold" (215). Bình defends his right to represent himself creatively.

But this firm stance is called into question in an earlier scene in the novel, when Bình suggests that his awkward use of the French language, a sign of his position in the lower class and his lack of education, inspires Stein's modernist poetics. She is especially amused when he searches for the word *pineapple* but can only describe it as "a pear . . .

not a pear" (35). Catherine Fung points out that this phrase echoes Stein's famous "rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" line since it similarly produces new meaning by stripping a word of signification through repetition (101). Unaware of Stein's earlier work, however, Bình explains why such a sentence would appeal to his employer: "GertrudeStein has, in turn, taken an interest in my, well, interpretation of the French language. She is affirmed by my use of negatives and repetitions. She is inspired by witnessing such an elemental, bare-knuckled breakdown of a language. She is a coconspirator. She would, of course, enjoy the show" (34). Like many of his stories, this account is invented: he could not possibly understand Stein's radical approach to language because he knows no English. And yet he uses his imagination to make himself the real "genius" behind literary modernism; to "document" his achievement by finding in the archive of Stein's texts evidence of his own presence; and, most significantly, to transform a moment when the race and class distinctions between Stein and him are particularly pronounced into a scene of creative connection, inspiration, and community formation. Although at one level Bình refuses to serve as inspiration ("fodder") for Stein's work, clearly seeing it as exploitation, at another he is happy to write himself into the "real" history of which she is a part.

Archival Breakdown in *The Swimming-Pool Library*

The Book of Salt, then, emphasizes the power of reparative accounts of the past and the ways in which the imagination and alternative temporalities might help develop

them. By contrast, Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library* makes clear exactly what is at stake in this approach to history. While Bình's archive obscures the difficult and painful relationships among queer people, *The Swimming-Pool Library* lays them bare through its juxtaposition of Lord Charles Nantwich and Will Beckwith, two gay Englishmen from different generations. By a chance encounter in 1983 Nantwich, an octogenarian and former civil servant in Sudan, meets Will, a young aesthete who enjoys the sexual freedoms of London's gay culture pre-AIDS. Nantwich asks Will to write his biography using diaries he has kept since adolescence. These diaries form just one of the many archives that Will stumbles across during the novel. Inserted throughout are long entries about Nantwich's prep school and college years, his colonial service, and his adventures as a sexually promiscuous middle-aged Londoner. Since Nantwich was born in 1900, his life and development parallel the century, and his diary presents a kind of shadow history that underlies more well-documented events. Rather than describing the familiar experience of the Blitz, for instance, Nantwich recounts having sex during the blackouts with American soldiers stationed in England. This shadow history is alluded to in the novel's opening lines when Will envisions a secret world underneath London. As he rides the subway, he considers what it must be like to work there: "As we went home and sank into unconsciousness gangs of these men . . . moved out along the tunnels" (3). The idea that there is a hidden network of tunnels underlying what we see mirrors the novel's depiction of queer culture: gay bars and health clubs create an "underworld full of

life, purpose and sexuality" (13), while sexual encounters often take place in this "shadowy world" where desires are communicated surreptitiously (315).

Just as *The Book of Salt* establishes the "at sea" temporality that exists outside the watchful eyes of heteronormative and colonial culture, *The Swimming-Pool Library* suggests that gaps in the historical record constitute erotically-charged spaces that might be capitalized on to create a different account of the past. The title of the novel suggests that readers view the entire book as a commentary on those gaps. In the prep school that both Nantwich and Will attended, the swimming pool is a well-known place of sexual experimentation among the male students. Generations of them have "learnt [their] stuff" in its confines (164). Put in charge of the natatorium, Will was designated the Swimming-Pool "Librarian" since that title is traditionally given to older students in leadership positions. Will fondly remembers the pool as a "library of uncatalogued pleasure" (165). The pleasures of gay sex, that is, *exceed* the historical record; these erotic experiences remain undocumented. The novel responds to this fact in two conflicting ways: it first begins the work of cataloguing that pleasure by detailing Nantwich's and Will's sex lives across the 20th century, but it also explores the possibility of replacing that work of historical recovery with invention and reparation, as Bình does in *The Book of Salt*. It thus presents two different kinds of archives that correspond to those projects: first, a "counterarchive" that works to recover information that might be otherwise lost using unconventional methods of documentation—which functions like the queer archives

proposed by Cvetkovich and other scholars[16]—and, second, what I have been calling the invented archive that, like Bình's, uses fictionalized evidence to tell a reparative history that might stimulate community-building and feelings of belonging. By including both kinds of queer archives, *The Swimming-Pool Library* offers significant insight into the historiographic implications of expanding our notion of the archive, highlighting both the imaginative possibilities and the potential limitations of fictionalizing historical evidence. While invented archives might foster affective connection, the novel reminds readers, they do not contain the moral and political value of "documentation" traditionally conceived. Ultimately, in my reading *The Swimming-Pool Library* serves as both an affirmation of and a corrective to Bình's archival impulse in *The Book of Salt*.

Archives are everywhere in Hollinghurst's novel: besides Nantwich's personal diary of sexual encounters, there is, for instance, graffiti on the wall inside a public restroom near Will's prep school that catalogues decades of "fantastic rendezvous" between lovers (315). Some of the scrawls describe heterosexual fantasies, but others clearly do not: "College boy, blond, big cock, in here Friday—meet me next Friday, 9 pm" (315). For a moment Will narcissistically assumes the post refers to him, but he finally discerns the date, 1964. This palimpsest of sexual encounters is a type of documentation that is often overlooked or discarded in traditional archives because it is

---

[16] Although Cvetkovich does not employ the term *counterarchive* in her pioneering work *An Archive of Feelings*, she has used it more recently to signify "a creative approach to archiving, an openness to unusual objects and collections, and an acknowledgement of that which escapes the archive" ("Queer Art" 32). As I mentioned earlier, Edenheim has recently pointed out that Cvetkovich's counterarchives are not substantially different from traditional ones.

vague, incomplete, and difficult to preserve. José Esteban Muñoz suggests that such archives of "invisible evidence" and "ephemera" are common in queer cultures since "queerness is often transmitted covertly" in order to avoid "leaving too much of a trace" ("Ephemera" 6). Nantwich's friend, photographer Ronald Staines, keeps an archive of memorabilia that includes this type of ephemera. He buys the belongings of famous queer men like the novelist Ronald Firbank, and he saves photographs and other objects that document queer lives that might otherwise be destroyed (186). In addition to these counterarchives, Staines also creates two invented archives: a pornographic film that purports to represent a scene from the past and a series of staged photographs that appears to show a number of queer men from a variety of historical periods.

Encountering those counterarchives that attempt to document a forgotten past, Will learns about a queer history that refutes the popular narrative of gay liberation in Britain in the twentieth century. In his version of this progressivist narrative, historian Jeffrey Weeks pictures a national "coming out" that began at the turn of the century as gay men reacted against the infamous Labouchère Amendment of 1885 under which Oscar Wilde and many other homosexuals were imprisoned for "gross indecency." Weeks argues that gay communities organized during that period to fight the oppressive measures of the British government and ultimately enabled their own liberation (ix). Patrick Higgins describes this popular narrative as a "series of myths that present[s] the recent history of Britain as a succession of liberalizing measures produced by an ever-enlightening public opinion in cooperation with a sensible elite that through the medium

of Parliament and a free press effected the necessary change" (142). Most important was the 1957 report of the Wolfenden Committee, which recommended the decriminalization of homosexual acts taking place in private, and the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which turned most of Wolfenden's recommendations into law. Chris Waters sees "the forward march of homosexual emancipation" in the fight for an equal age of consent (until 1994, the age of consent for homosexuals was 21 but 18 for heterosexuals), the recognition of domestic partnerships, and the legalization of gay marriage (qtd. in Houlbrook 242).[17] Like Hollinghurst, many queer scholars have criticized historians for perpetuating these kinds of narratives, suggesting that they paint a too-rosy picture of the past and pay little attention to the subtleties of queer history. Heather Love believes that their accounts do not adequately acknowledge "the [queer] experience of social exclusion and . . . the historical 'impossibility' of same-sex desire" (4); by focusing on the progress that has been made, she argues, they ignore the complexity of the queer past. The history revealed in Will's encounter with the novel's counterarchives reveals not only painful experiences but also past pleasures that are often glossed over in tidy narratives of progress.

Hollinghurst has said that part of his goal in writing the novel was to celebrate the seventeen years of relative permissiveness between the 1967 Sexual Offences Act and 1983, when the onset of AIDS in Britain curbed many sexual freedoms (Cassidy). Consequently, many critics read *The Swimming-Pool Library* as an elegy for an idyllic

---

[17] This paragraph is influenced by the account offered by Matt Houlbrook in *Queer London* (see especially 242).

time that had passed by the time the book was published in 1988. But to make such an argument is to disregard Hollinghurst's careful attention to what is usually left out of histories of sexuality altogether: the often uncomfortable ways in which queer histories intersect with other histories of oppression. If the novel commemorates those seventeen years, it is not quite with an elegiac or celebratory spirit; instead, the narrative insists that, even at its most open and permissive, gay culture maintained well-established hierarchies of race and class.

The counterarchive Will encounters throws into relief the inequalities at the center of many of the relationships among queer men in the novel. Nantwich's diaries reveal that both colonial *and* sexual exploitation were at the heart of empire building. The former civil servant maintains that he was especially well-suited for his job in Sudan because of his sexual preference for black men: "There was this absolute adoration of black people . . . . I've always had to be among them, you know, negroes, and I've always gone straight for them" (283). He becomes unusually attached to Taha, one of his native servants who accompanies him back to England. Even though they never have sex and Taha eventually marries, Nantwich thinks of their relationship as "a marriage, a great, chaste bond of love and tact" (301). His "adoration" for Africans is also, of course, condescension, and the combination of the two leads Nantwich to be an excellent colonial ruler. He is sympathetic to the Sudanese, even suggesting that people of color are "superior" to others (132), but he never wavers from his faith in colonialism. In the same paragraph in one of his diary entries, Nantwich decries the suffering of colonized peoples

and glorifies his own role as an administrator: “The sheer evil of [the mistreatment by the British] oppressed my heart as I went through the village, putting things to right, rewarding & punishing & laying down the law. At least our justice is felt to be justice” (239).

By portraying Nantwich as confident and comfortable with both his sexuality and his duties as a colonial administrator, Hollinghurst suggests that queer subjects, especially those with power, were frequently complicit with the oppressive institutions and ideologies that their sexual identity seemed to defy. Nantwich does not see the contradiction; in fact, he alleges that homosexuals were specifically recruited to help govern the colonies because they “were prone to immense idealism and dedication” (282). This statement is likely an exaggeration since there is no evidence that gay men were especially adept at this job. However, some scholars have suggested that homosexuals were drawn to the service abroad because of a repressed sexual energy that was productively channeled into empire-building (Stone 379-80) or because of the promise of sexual freedom in a more permissive locale (Hyam). In contrast, Christopher Lane convincingly argues that homosexuality was fundamentally at odds with the “allegedly unifying principles of colonialism” because it shattered the idea of a monolithic British identity and nation (4). Furthermore, many historians have shown that throughout the twentieth century the British government usually viewed homosexuals as enemies of the state (Houlbrook 240; Cook 145-6; Higgins 28-32). In both world wars, for instance, sodomy, treachery, and foreignness were often linked in the press so that

homosexuality was not only illegal but also "positively unpatriotic" (Cook 146). During the Cold War, the word *homintern* was used to denote a vaguely threatening global network of gay men that was associated with Communism (David 122; Johnson 30-8). The fact that Nantwich erroneously believes that his sexuality makes him a *better* British civil servant shows that above all he identifies with his class, privilege, and nation.

As many scholars have noted, Nantwich's colonial experiences are the ancestors of Will's exploitative sexual escapades in the 1980s.[18] The facts that might be found in Nantwich's counterarchive are clearly ones that Will himself needs to confront. Like Nantwich, Will is attracted by "youngness and blackness" (38). Early in the book Will describes a sexual encounter with Arthur, a seventeen-year-old boy from a West Indian immigrant family. Will is attracted to him precisely because of the characteristics that mark him as a person of color: "Oh, the ever-open softness of black lips; and the strange dryness of the knots of his pigtails, which crackled as I rolled them between my fingers, and seemed both dead and half-erect" (5). Arthur is here reduced to his race; his lips are appealing not because they are his but because they serve as just another confirmation of a generalization Will has made about black men. Will also basks in the class differences between them, eroticizing Arthur's lack of education when he admits that "the fact that

---

[18] See Cooper 138, 143; Brown and Sant; Bristow 177; Dellamora 177; and Lewis 98-9. For a contrasting view, see Corber and Alderson. Both suggest that Will's treatment of his lovers is much worse than Nantwich's. Alderson believes that the novel shows that present-day relationships are a "violation of older ideals" that Nantwich represents (33), while Corber argues that Nantwich's reverence for black men is "potentially subversive," undermining the power structures that Will heartily endorses (134). I would argue that both critics too easily gloss over the exploitation at work in Nantwich's relationships with men of other races and classes.

[Arthur] had not mastered speech, that he laboured towards saying the simplest things, that his vocal expressions were prompted only by the strength of his feelings, unlike the camp, exploitative, ironical control of my own speech, made me want him more" (74). Further, Will takes pleasure in the fact that he has power and social standing while his teenage lovers are impoverished members of the working class: "[I]t was a strange conviction I had," Will says, "that I could somehow make these boys' lives better, as by a kind of patronage" (332). Despite his stated noble intentions, most of Will's sexual experiences are not so much moments of shared intimacy as struggles for power that can quickly turn abusive. Such is the case in a particularly lewd encounter between Will and Phil, an eighteen-year-old waiter. Worried that their semi-serious relationship may be coming to an end, Will reasserts his dominance through sex. He forces his fully-clothed partner to urinate in the kitchen before having sex with him in the puddle (190).

The original cover of the book lauded *The Swimming-Pool Library* as "highly sexed," and critics praised its representation of gay sex as refreshingly honest and graphic. But scenes like the one with Phil are not a celebration of openness and gay sexuality, and they do more than reveal the "pornographic—that is, the reductively sexual, standardized, and fetishistic—quality of contemporary desires," as David Alderson suggests (37). He argues that Hollinghurst purposefully juxtaposes Will's gritty liaisons and Nantwich's idealized sexual encounters, which are depicted as romantic and innocent rendezvous only possible in a bygone era (33-6). But Alderson fails to see that many of Nantwich's experiences are also violently erotic, like the "orgiastic free-for-alls"

at his prep school that sometimes involve rape (128-9, 131). I suggest that, taken together, Nantwich's and Will's experiences serve as a reminder that a counterarchive of the queer past can perform the politically important work of exposing and documenting exploitation.

Nantwich's diaries also explore the antagonisms at work in relationships between queer subjects of the same race and class. Nantwich suggests that the very men who enforce homophobic laws often participated in gay sex at boarding school: "Those who were not killed are running the country & the empire, examples of righteousness, & each of them knowing they have done these unspeakable things. I suppose it is a part of the tacit lore of manhood, like going with whores or getting drunk, which are not incompatible with respectability and power" (132). Although Nantwich recognizes the hypocrisy of government leaders, he is still shocked when he is arrested in 1954 for gross indecency. In the book's climactic moment, Nantwich reveals Will's own connection to the persecution of homosexuals: Will's beloved grandfather was responsible for the large-scale "gay pogrom" during which Nantwich was arrested (325). According to Nantwich, Sir Denis Beckwith, serving as Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), was "more than anybody . . . the inspiration of this 'purge' as he calls it, this *crusade to eradicate male vice*" (304, italics original).

The inspiration for Beckwith's fictional character may be Theobald Mathew, who served as DPP from 1944 to 1964. Along with Home Secretary David Maxwell Fyfe and Commissioner of Police John Nott-Bower, he was rabidly homophobic. Under the

leadership of these three, arrests of homosexuals tripled in the period after World War II (Houlbrook 34). Among those taken into custody were actor John Gielgud, peer Lord Montagu, and journalist Peter Wildeblood. Their high-profile arrests left the gay community outraged and on guard. Recently historians have attributed the spike in arrests to divisional changes in the police department rather than a "witch hunt" orchestrated by top officials (Houlbrook 35-7; Cook 170; Higgins 250).[19] Still, the 1950s were a particularly dangerous time for homosexuals. Hugh David explains the mindset of many gay men: "Police spies were everywhere, or so it was believed; walls had ears (sometimes quite literally so—the first authorized use of telephone tapping in Scotland had been to acquire evidence of a suspect's homosexuality). Wherever he went, the 'queer' had perpetually to be on his guard" (157). The highly publicized arrests and the pervasive atmosphere of fear ultimately created a backlash. In 1954—the year of Nantwich's arrest—the British government established the Wolfenden Committee and charged it with reevaluating the laws against homosexuality. Will's grandfather, who was rewarded with a peerage in the wake of the crackdown, embodies the spirit of persecution: Nantwich writes in his diary, "I have the image of him before me now in the courtroom at my sentencing, to which he had come out of pure vindictiveness, and of his handsome suaveté in the gallery, his flush and thrill of pride as I went down" (305). This

---

[19] The situation in the United States was completely different: the so-called "Lavender Scare," instigated by Senator Joseph McCarthy during the more prominent Red Scare, *was* a government-mandated "witch hunt" designed to root out homosexuals employed by the State. However, there is evidence that the American crackdown actually affected attitudes in Britain, since the US pressured its allies to follow its example (Johnson 132-3).

cruelty is directly connected to Will's money and class standing, which are made possible by the homophobia and violent intolerance of his grandfather. Will's life as a promiscuous, self-indulgent aesthete is founded on and funded by the very same oppressive measures that sent Nantwich to prison.

If Bình's invented archive aligns with Sedgwick's reparative approach, as I have suggested, then the counterarchive of Nantwich's diaries constitutes what she calls a "paranoid" mode, a worldview committed above all to "the detection of hidden patterns of violence and their exposure" ("Paranoid" 143). Indeed, upon reading Nantwich's paranoid history, Will is struck by the similarities between the arrest of the older gentleman in 1954 and the arrest of Will's best friend James in 1983. Both men were imprisoned after they were entrapped into breaking laws against homosexuality. The connection between the two arrests leads Will to realize that, although he always felt that he could be more open about his sexuality in 1983 than Nantwich could in 1923, many situations had in fact not improved since the beginning of the century. During a conversation with his brother-in-law Gavin, Will connects the two arrests, acknowledging that Nantwich "was sent to prison and it's obviously scarred him or whatever—*and* he was set up by some pretty policeman, and that's really not another world, Gavin, it's going on in London now almost every day" (310). This momentary insight results not only from James's arrest but also from Will's own encounter with violence when he suffers a bad beating by skinheads who attack him because he is a "poof" (202).

In the end these experiences lead Will to nothing more than half-hearted commitment and fleeting political engagement although Nantwich hopes to inspire a more sustained interest. Sedgwick writes that "paranoia . . . acts as though its work would be accomplished if only it could finally, this time, somehow get its story truly known. That a fully initiated listener could still remain indifferent or inimical, or might have no help to offer, is hardly treated as a possibility" ("Paranoid" 138). But that is exactly the case with Will: despite feeling "solidarity with [his] kind" for the first time (261), his dedication to helping James escape the charges wanes, and he soon becomes unenthusiastic, returning to his vacuous life as a narcissistic hedonist. Perhaps most troubling is that, although he is able to draw the connections between James and Nantwich, Will refuses to see the similarities between Nantwich and himself. At one point he notes their comparable experiences at the same prep school—he sees a "fore-echo" of his life in one of Nantwich's anecdotes (150)—but he remains blind to their similar fetishistic fixation with dark skinned men. The older man invites him to observe the shooting of a pornographic film he is financing, and Will is offended by it. He asks Nantwich how he can reconcile his appreciation for black men with his exploitation of them in the film. Nantwich responds that the men enjoy making the films, which are widely distributed in theaters like the one Will himself frequents. If Nantwich's film is an example of exploitation, Will is forced to admit that he and Nantwich are both guilty of it. But his feeling of connection to the older man does not last long. Although he has become well acquainted with the octogenarian and his past, he does not understand how

Nantwich's actions are reflected in his own life. In the novel's final lines, he appears to turn toward the past with some interest when he encounters "several old boys, one or two perhaps even of Charles's age, and doubtless all with their own story, strange and yet oddly comparable, to tell" (336). He feels drawn to them momentarily, but he quickly shifts back to his old ways and begins cruising for dark-skinned men. By associating the turn away from history with a selfish, unappealing character, Hollinghurst holds out hope that his readers will view Will as a negative example and pay attention to the lessons of history that he ignores.

So far I have been arguing that, through its representation of counterarchives that document historical facts often forgotten in mainstream accounts, *The Swimming-Pool Library* reveals the historical truths that may be left out of reparative histories like those Bình creates in his invented archives. In doing so, I do not mean to suggest that there are rigid distinctions between fact and fiction, between "real" counterarchives and invented archives. Hollinghurst's novel clearly shows that *all* archives require not only interpretation but also imagination. Nantwich's diaries at first seem to provide Will with a reliable, first-hand account of the experiences of a man who has lived through many of the major events of the twentieth century. After skimming through one of the volumes, however, Will notices that "there must have been so much more, for the book showed only the self-imposed thoroughness of the dull-witted or the lonely" (115). Nantwich himself acknowledges that the mundane details recorded in his diary do not accurately convey his story. He feels that writing his biography will be a creative endeavor: "There

is a book in my life, but it's almost entirely to do with imagination and all that. The facts, my sweet William, are as nothing" (281). Still, Hollinghurst contrasts archives that seek to communicate historical truth, like Nantwich's diaries, with archives that are intentionally falsified or fabricated to satiate desires for a queer past, like the photographic and film archives created by Staines. For Hollinghurst, those archives that make claims to truth—even if they have been imaginatively embellished or supplemented—wield the power to transform consciousness (if not Will's, then the reader's); by contrast, invented archives driven by erotic desire for connection may contain only limited political value and obscure inequalities that deserve to be recognized.

The fictional archives that Staines creates represent the desire for a queer "touch across time" that Dinshaw identifies. In fact, they are so eroticized that I read them as a kind of "historical cruising"—a literal search for sexual stimulation in the historical record. The first invented archive Will comes across is a collection of photographs that Staines took that provide a fictional history of homosexuality, including images that pose gay men as Greek citizens and some "Edwardian pics" that feature them in the style of the early twentieth century (186). Although these photographs are not pornographic, they seem to be inspired mostly by erotic fantasies. In fact, Staines' invitation for Will to pose for one of the photographs comes across as a pick-up line, despite his assuring Will that they are "nothing naughty *at all*": "I think you'd make an interesting subject for me. It's such a very English look, [yours], the pink and gold number and the long, straight nose"

(186-7, 52). By photographing gay men in recreated historical scenes, Staines affirms the presence of queer people across time. Even if the photographs are clearly staged examples of silly camp, they lend their power to Staines' way of rewriting history to include gay men. Like the photograph of the man Bình believes to be Ho Chi Minh, they provide tangible "proof" of a queer historical presence. As Staines himself says, a photograph is "a bit of life sealed in for ever" (51). Further, these staged pictures are mixed in with real images from the past that include shots of Nantwich and his family; their location in a genuine "archive" elevates them to the level of historical evidence. Another of Staines' artistic endeavors is the historical pornographic film Nantwich is financing that Will is invited to watch being staged. Although it certainly does not masquerade as official documentation, it still represents the fantasy of queer sex across time. The plot details are scarce, but readers learn that the film "is very old-fashion[ed]" and set in the distant past (219).

The problem with these two archives is that they are the product of violence against queer bodies that is at odds with the affirmation of queer historical presence they provide. Staines deliberately seeks out working-class people of color to convince them to pose for his pictures. Even Will is horrified that the actors in the porn film are the servers at the dining club to which Nantwich and Staines belong: "I was staggered to think that [Nantwich]—and Staines—could actually lure the staff elsewhere and make them act out those fantasies which they must have fathered in sly glances over their fatty beef, soapy veg and boiled school puddings. What bizarre transactions and transitions must have

taken place" (219). Although the men themselves seem grateful for the attention and the paycheck—one of the actors tells Will that he feels "very luck" [*sic*] that Staines "discovered [him]" (272)—their participation enables an exploitative interaction between queer men that Hollinghurst clearly finds troubling. During filming, one man, wearing a fur coat and bearing what look to be painful scars on his torso, strikes Will as "some exquisite game animal, partly skinned and then thrown aside still breathing" (220). While the novel certainly recognizes the pleasures to be had from sexual encounters across difference,[20] this moment forces readers to see the devastating inequality and dehumanization at work in some of these interactions and the way that historical fantasy can foster such a reaction.

Furthermore, in the novel's final pages, Hollinghurst strongly suggests that these invented archives possess little political and legal power. After James is arrested, Will asks Staines if he may look again through the photographs in his studio. As Will sifts through them, he hopes to find one that he had noted on a previous visit: a picture of Colin, with whom he had once had sex. When Will discovers that Colin was the young undercover policeman who arrested James, he believes that locating his portrait will help to exonerate James by proving that he was entrapped by an *agent provocateur*. In his most politically motivated act in the novel, Will dives into this invented archive in order to find evidence to help his friend. But Will is never able to find the photograph even

---

[20] For more on the erotic possibilities found within relationships structured by power differentials or inequalities, see Alan Sinfield's *On Sexuality and Power*.

though he remembers its exact location, and he believes that Staines and perhaps even Nantwich have deliberately hidden it from him. The archive with its quasi-documentary evidence that might have been mustered for political victory disappears, concealed by the very community that might benefit from it. With this unexpected plot twist, Hollinghurst emphasizes the failures of the invented archive: it can never possess the truth-force of "real" evidence. What is seen as a shortcoming in *The Swimming-Pool Library* is a strength in *The Book of Salt*, for it is precisely the fact that his archive stands apart from the official historical record that allows Bình to write a story of reparation.

From one angle Hollinghurst's novel appears to suffer from a kind of nostalgia: he yearns for a traditional archive that would document the queer past. With this in mind, it is worth remembering that *The Swimming-Pool Library* constitutes an early response to the AIDS crisis. Published in 1988 but set in the summer of 1983, just months before the epidemic widely broke out in Britain, the novel makes only one oblique reference to the tragedy to come: Will says, "I was riding high on sex and self-esteem—it was my time, my *belle époque*—but all the while with a faint flicker of calamity, like flames around a photograph" (6). Given the novel's interest in how photographs function as authentic documents, this description is particularly significant. Referring to AIDS as "flames around a photograph" is to depict the crisis's potential to annihilate both history and archive. Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed suggest that the epidemic became "an agent of amnesia" not only because people were dying and their memories lost but also because many in the gay community quickly wanted to distance themselves from

AIDS' specter of death and in the process separated themselves from queer history altogether (3). In this context it seems that Hollinghurst shows concern that history might be lost, and, in particular, that the painful but necessary lessons of history—lessons about legacies of oppression *within* queer cultures—might not be preserved for generations to come. The crisis of the archive that I argue is central to the novel is actually a crisis about the *future* of the archive: Who will read Nantwich's diaries now, as the epidemic takes its toll? Will they, like Hollinghurst's protagonist, remain largely unaffected by the stories contained therein? Although the novel clearly understands the utility of an invented archive, it ultimately affirms the power of a counterarchive that might transmit important knowledge and experience. In *Archive Fever* Jacques Derrida argues that "[t]he question of the archive is not . . . a question of the past. . . . It is a question of the future . . . the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come" (36). Writing under the pressure of the AIDS crisis, Hollinghurst appears particularly invested in an archive that might withstand the test of time and retain value for communities in the future.

While Hollinghurst hopes his characters will connect across generations in the swimming pool, the "library of uncatalogued pleasures," Truong places Bình "at sea" in his own world. The queer community he creates through his invented archives is for himself alone; he does not intend it to sustain others or be preserved for the use of later generations. Through his archival interest in the past, he is able to engage in the present

and make a world for himself there. Although his archive may not bear the moral force that Nantwich's does, Bình's approach is politically charged in its own way since it resists the compulsory orientation toward the future that linear progressive histories require. Like Truong's protagonist, the texts in the chapters that follow regard promises of a better future with suspicion but work to develop other methods for remaining hopeful.

CHAPTER 2

THE FUTURE IS HERE: HOPE AND THE UNIFIED NOW IN *THE INTUITIONIST* AND *LONG DIVISION*

In a 2009 *New York Times* editorial, novelist Colson Whitehead facetiously announced an American achievement: "One year ago today, we officially became a postracial society. Fifty-three percent of the voters opted for the candidate who would be the first president of African descent, and in doing so eradicated racism forever." Whitehead's ironic rhetoric replicates almost exactly the victorious proclamations that surrounded Obama's campaign and election. After the candidate won an early primary, the crowd's chant "Race doesn't matter!" reverberated from South Carolina across the nation (Barabak). Whitehead views that cry as an acknowledgment of temporary triumph, not as the herald of fundamental change. His editorial makes clear what is both appealing and preposterous about such claims: the idea that a problem like racial inequality can be fixed in one day; that we can use a historical event to mark a clearly delineated "before" and "after"; that progress can be measured in percentages alone.

Kiese Laymon, another African American novelist from Whitehead's generation, recalls being so caught up in the craze surrounding Obama's success that he momentarily envisioned a post-racial society. In his imagination he pictures himself driving home to Mississippi for Christmas wearing an Obama shirt and bringing others as gifts for his extended family. He expects the worst when he stops at an Alabama gas station and sees

"fourteen working-class white locals look at me and my Obama shirt with hate in their mind, envy in their hearts, and 'Niggers these days' on the tips of their thin wet lips" (*How to Slowly* 101). Then his fears magically dissipate: "Within seconds, the locals are wearing my Obama shirts . . . talking that good shit with some other black Alabamans and me about the underrated importance of moral imagination and local activism" (101). However, Laymon recognizes that this fantasy cannot be realized as long as racism remains deeply entrenched, and he quickly substitutes his dream of immediate transformation—like the kind envisioned in Whitehead's satire—with his belief that "Obama will win. *We* will win. Then we will continue to lose. And the right questions will never be honestly asked or answered" (102). Although he is tempted to feel hopeful, the author understands that Obama's presidency is also cause for despair since it will enable Americans to gloss over the serious problems at the heart of present-day race relations.

Because it declares victories in the realm of racial politics, the discourse of postraciality provides an example of the progressivist narratives that the texts throughout my dissertation call into question. The use of the terms *postracial* or *postrace* varies widely from popular culture to scholarly conversation. To some critics, the words signify an acknowledgement that race is not a biological category but a cultural construct. A number of others argue that *postrace* designates a shift in the form that racism takes. Kenneth W. Warren has provocatively suggested that, because racism is no longer primarily manifested through "the obvious expressions of segregation and

discrimination," our understanding of race must change (5-6). He argues that "the terms of racial hierarchy that existed for much of the twentieth century"—those that produced the Jim Crow laws and the civil rights movement—no longer explain "the defining elements of the current [racial regime]" (5). Stephen Best would likely agree since he finds *postracial* only useful in the "sense that the logic of racial slavery does not fully describe or capture racial injustice in the present" (474). In a slightly different vein, pundit and television personality Touré contends that while *Blackness* signifies a core identity that was politically necessary during the civil rights era, *post-Blackness* names a new period in which "identity options are limitless" for African Americans because of the freedoms secured by that earlier campaign (8-9, 12).

In their discussions of *postrace*, however, all of these authors, like Whitehead and Laymon, make clear that racism is far from over. Even so, in popular discourse the term is most commonly taken to mean "after the end of racism." *Postracist*, as Ta-Nehisi Coates points out, is probably a more accurate reflection of the word's meaning. But does anyone actually believe that we are living in a postracial era, especially after the 2015 shooting in South Carolina and the protests surrounding the earlier deaths of unarmed black teenagers Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown?[21] While scholarly and popular articles frequently mention our "supposedly postrace era" or the "so-called postrace era,"

---

[21] 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot in 2012 by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watchman who was guarding a gated community in Florida through which Martin was walking. Zimmerman was tried and found not guilty. 18-year-old Michael Brown was killed by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Charges were never filed against Wilson.

it is difficult to find anyone seriously suggesting that racism is over.[22] Bloggers, pundits, politicians, and scholars alike are arguing not against a few outspoken critics or academics but against a pervasive sense that we *are* largely postrace. A Pew Research Center survey conducted in December 2014 found that approximately half of Americans—mostly white—believe that race is no longer a major national concern (Speri). This view can even be detected in much of the media coverage of incidents of racial violence like the Martin and Brown deaths and the Charleston shooting. When two or three incidents of police brutality are viewed as aberrant, the assumption is that racism is not a system-wide problem in law enforcement. The same is true when the perpetrator of a racially-motivated shooting is declared mentally ill: a single sick individual is blamed while a fundamentally racist order is absolved.

The idea that racial equality has already been achieved—that the dreamed-of future is here—undermines the political desires of minority groups and creates an atmosphere in which injustices may be overlooked or excused. Without an investment in the future and a dream of improvements to come, it is difficult to maintain a strong commitment to effecting positive change or, as Lee Edelman shows, to participate in the realm of politics at all. Edelman's response, as I noted in my introduction, is to advocate the opposite approach. Arguing that the future is solely the domain of hegemonic culture,

---

[22] However, there are some scholars who come close. Dinesh D'Souza, for instance, writes that "[r]acism undoubtedly exists, but it no longer has the power to thwart blacks or any other groups in achieving their economic, political, and social aspirations" (525). Black author Shelby Steele argues something similar when he suggests that, although "garden variety racism" persists, he has never felt limited by his race (169).

he suggests that the only way to resist its oppression is to forsake futurity, refuse to hope, and commit oneself to negation (4). But many artists and critics have insisted on a commitment to the future, and the pernicious claims of post-raciality threaten the work they have done to infuse their creative productions with a sense of forward-looking hope, a survival mechanism that helps marginalized peoples endure the disappointments of the present. For instance, Afrofuturists working in fiction, fine art, and music set out to imagine a space for black individuals in the decades and centuries to come, providing an important corrective to sci fi and fantasy literature and film that fail to represent people of color in their futuristic visions.

Others have worked to counteract the depression that comes with political setbacks. Cornel West proposes the concept of "blues hope" as a "morally sound" response "learned and earned in the harsh realities of daily struggle" (6). Steeped in sadness, blues hope "remains on intimate terms with death" (6). This kind of hope may be usefully connected to Ernst Bloch's idea of "educated hope," which he defines as a "well-founded hope" that is vulnerable to being disappointed ("Can Hope" 340). In his view, for hope to be meaningful it must "hol[d] . . . the condition of defeat precariously within itself" ("Can Hope" 341). Also of a piece with West's "blues hope" is the work of Ann Cvetkovich and José Esteban Muñoz, both of whom theorize how we might "live a better life by embracing rather than glossing over bad feelings" (Cvetkovich, *Depression* 3). Cvetkovich asks how "feeling bad might, in fact, be the ground for transformation," suggesting that depression may paradoxically lead to hope (*Depression* 3). In his work on

queer futurity, Muñoz shows that a desire for utopia unexpectedly arises from hopelessness in the "poisonous and insolvent" present (*Cruising* 28, 30). However, the promise of a post-racial society and the premature claims that it is already here pose a challenge of a different kind: how do marginalized people maintain hope for a better future in the face not only of disappointment and despair but also of post-racial positivity that obviates the need for improvement and change?

Whitehead and Laymon address this conundrum directly in their first novels, *The Intuitionist* (1999) and *Long Division* (2013). In this chapter I suggest that these texts theorize a useful strategy for reconfiguring both hope and futurity in the face of the triumphalist claims that have been circulating for the last twenty years. They depict the future in two contradictory ways: the traditional view that the future is a time distinct from the present that is brimming with possibilities and the unconventional notion that past and future are integrated into a single present, forming a new entity which I designate *the unified now*. Certainly the view of past, present, and future collapsed together is not new; Augustine proposed something similar when he asserted that the present consists solely of memories of the past and anticipation of the future (Currie 13). I suggest, however, that the unified now as these two authors depict it takes on a political significance in our current "postracial" moment. Through their paradoxical view of the future, Whitehead and Laymon address the achievements and failures of the past, racial discrimination and prejudice in the disappointing present, and hope for a future of racial equality. These authors offer a method for reorienting ourselves temporally and

affectively in the contemporary moment, attuning our minds to the ways that the future can be accessed in the present without losing hope for long-term change.

Rejecting the simplistic view that social change occurs in a linear progression, Whitehead and Laymon seem to subscribe in part to what Mark Currie calls an "untensed view of time" which "hold[s] that there is no ontological distinction between past, present, and future" (15). In this model, the future is available within the present, and "time is a kind of spatialized block in which all events are seen as existing together" (17). Some might argue that compressing time risks losing individual agency and hope for political change: if the future is already here, how can we influence it for the better? But Bloch suggests that thinking about time as the unified now is necessary for achieving social justice. He believes that the future exists within the present as the "not yet," a barely perceivable inkling of what-is-to-come that might be accessed through brief glimpses and imaginative musings (*Principle* 144). It is precisely the liminal status of Bloch's future—it is both here and not here, existing in the present but also not yet available—that inspires politically engaged hope. If the future were only in some far-distant time, we would not be able to imagine it or see its connection to our own world. On the other hand, if the future existed only in the unified now, it would "make peace with the existing world" and fail to prompt change and transformation ("Can Hope" 341). Like Bloch, Whitehead and Laymon show how an ontologically uncertain future may lead to a critical re-investment in the present.

The Intuitionist and *Long Division* use the concept of the unified now to explore contemporary racial dynamics. They suggest that the present contains *both* the painful past *and* a hopeful future where characters are able to connect despite distance and difference. By depicting this dissident temporality in which the future is both far removed and already here, Whitehead and Laymon offer hope for change now, even when the circumstances of the present moment do not seem to warrant it. Further, they suggest that fictional texts provide the means through which to dilate the present in order to activate its utopian possibilities. At the same time, these authors also adhere to more conventional temporalities by setting in motion narrative plots that seem to be leading toward the promise of equality and social justice that remain out of reach at the present time. They recognize that these idealistic visions are necessarily hazy and often irrational but show that they retain a powerful ability to stir the imagination with a hopefulness that counteracts the false promises and empty triumphs of a supposedly post-racial era.

***The Intuitionist*: Utopia to Come, Utopia Now**

Appropriately enough for a novel concerned with utopia, the central image in Whitehead's 1999 novel *The Intuitionist* is the elevator, which holds the promise of eternal uplift. In the fantastical world that the author creates, the commonplace machine is revered as the "international short-range vertical transport" (15). The Chair of the Elevator Guild is one of the most desired government positions, and its members appear on billboards and make fortunes in endorsements (15). Although a huge bureaucracy

oversees the installation, use, and repair of these all-important devices, the day-to-day work is carried out by elevator inspectors, who receive their training at specialized institutes. They are divided into two groups, Empiricists and Intuitionists. The former make observations and run diagnostic tests to determine problems in the elevator while the latter have an innate ability to sense the condition of each machine. As the older group with more members, the Empiricists have greater status, but the Intuitionists are more accurate in their assessments (58).

Several years after the death of visionary inspector James Fulton, creator of Intuitionism, industry insiders learn that he drew up blueprints for a "perfect" elevator that will reconceive mobility and take passengers to the "second elevation" (61). All of them scramble to locate his plans for the mysterious "black box" that they can neither "see inside" nor "imagine, like the shape of angels' teeth" (61).[23] Rival factions aim to construct the elevator in order to one-up their competitors or to destroy Fulton's plans before they become public. Whitehead uses the black box to consider a variety of approaches to futurity and to criticize several of the dangerously blithe ideas about social change circulating at the end of the millennium. However, the novel does not forsake all utopian dreams, instead suggesting that—if calibrated correctly—they may usefully remake both present and future.

---

[23] This type of plot device—a central object that the entire cast of characters desires and hunts—is often called a MacGuffin, a term made popular by Alfred Hitchcock (see Truffaut 138). Its deployment in *The Intuitionist* plants the novel firmly in the noir genre since MacGuffins are central to a number of classic noir films such as *The Maltese Falcon*, as Jeffrey Allen Tucker points out (152).

Protagonist Lila Mae Watson, a young inspector devoted to Fulton's methodology, is recruited to help with the search. A loner, she characterizes her situation as "three times cursed" since she is the only black female Intuitionist (20). During her pursuit of the black box, she learns that Fulton was African American and passed as white in order to overcome the racial biases of his time and to guarantee a forum for his ideas. Realizing that race is central to understanding both Fulton's philosophy and his plans for the black box, Lila Mae begins to re-read his works through the lens of his blackness and her own: "It all meant something differently now. Fulton's nigresence whispered from the binding of [his books], tinting the disciples' words, reconnoting them. Only she could see it, this shadow" (151). The omniscient narrator explains that Fulton's theories about the black box grew out of his experiences as the child of a poor black mother in the rural South. He dreamed about escaping from the "mud and . . . wood walls that don't keep the cold out" and white Southerners who "do not see colored people, even in broad daylight" (134). He longed for an urban environment where his racial identity would not be questioned because "[n]obody knows where you came from" (134). His dreams of escape and upward mobility were encapsulated in his belief that "*There is another world beyond this one*" (134). Later, he uses the same words to refer to the future promised by the black box. His dreams of racial equality are thus explicitly connected to his visions of a utopia created by technology.

Whitehead provides only vague details about the inner workings of Fulton's black box. Exactly what it will look like and the kind of future it promises to launch remain

unstated. As a result, it functions as a kind of screen on which various characters project their competing notions of the future. Lila Mae believes that it will usher in a world of technical virtuosity. For a black character named Natchez, it is a means for African Americans to secure status and to have a voice in determining their own destiny. Corporate executives at different elevator companies recognize that acquisition of the plans for the black box will provide them economic power and control over the entire industry. Even Fulton himself conceptualized the perfect elevator in more than one way; each of the two volumes of his *Theoretical Elevators* presents a different idea about the changes the black box will initiate.

Whitehead never fully resolves the tension between the different futures represented by the black box, but he does find fault with the utopian idea that technology can revolutionize racial dynamics, revealing it to be the kind of unrealistic false narrative that he satirized years later in his *New York Times* editorial. In a flashback to 1853, the American vice-president addresses spectators at the Crystal Palace Exhibition, where Elisha Otis unveils his passenger elevator. He enthusiastically proclaims: "Our exhibition [of industrial innovations] cannot fail to soften if not eradicate altogether, the prejudices and animosities which have so long retarded the happiness of nations" (80). When the Internet became widely available more than a century later, some analysts made a similar argument, suggesting that computer technology would eradicate racism and make society colorblind. Noting that computers allow individuals to communicate anonymously, they believed that race would no longer be an issue. They envisioned something akin to

Marshall McLuhan's idea of a "global village" created by technology that enabled instantaneous communication between people in places around the world (80). Connected as never before, McLuhan suggested, people would begin to care more about each other and work toward the common good. Expressing similar ideas, the vice-president in *The Intuitionist* suggests in his speech that new technologies will inevitably bring people closer together: "We are living in a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end to which all history points—the realization of the unity of mankind. The distances which separated the different nations are rapidly vanishing with the achievements of modern invention" (80-1). Criticizing this kind of rhetoric, Afrofuturist scholar Alondra Nelson sees the notion "that race (and gender) distinctions would be eliminated with technology" as fanciful, suggesting that it was "the founding fiction of the digital age" (1). In his novel Whitehead debunks the vice-president's predictions and warns against empty promises of progress. *The Intuitionist* depicts a world where racism remains deeply entrenched despite the widespread interest in technologic advancement. Lila Mae is consistently reminded of her racial inferiority. In one scene, the Chair of the Elevator Guild reminds her that he can punish her with impunity if she doesn't give him Fulton's blueprints "[b]ecause no one cares about a nigger" (116).

Despite the skepticism with which Whitehead regards these predictions of a technological utopia, he never fully undermines the promise contained within utopian thinking. Rather than accepting the dreams of hegemonic culture, however, he suggests

that people of color adopt ideas about the future that are of their own making. Lila Mae meets Natchez, a con man who poses as Fulton's nephew to pump her for information about the black box. He convinces her to help him find the blueprints by explaining that the perfect elevator is an invention that black people should control: "It's the future of the cities. But it's our future, not theirs. . . . What [Fulton] made, this elevator, colored people made that" (139-40). Although he is lying to her about his intentions, she is seduced by his logic. For Natchez the perfect elevator holds the promise of a future centered on the experiences and perceptions of African Americans, one that promises to redefine their position in society. Rather than making people of color players in the narrative of progress promulgated by culture-at-large, the black box contains the exciting potential to remake the world from a minority perspective.

In volume I of *Theoretical Elevators* Fulton suggests that his technology will create a new city that will be nothing like "the cities [they] suffer now, these stunted shacks" that have skylines of "broken teeth, an angry serration gnawing at the atmosphere" (61, 17). Fulton's construct will build an unrecognizable and disorienting place sure to inspire awe: "Just as the barbarian would gaze upon our cities and buildings with fear and incomprehension, so would we gaze upon future cities and future buildings. Is the next building ovoid, pyramidic? Is the next elevator a bubble or is it shaped like a sea shell, journeying both outward and into itself" (37). Lila Mae also subscribes to this vision, believing that the black box will be a reimagining of raw materials as well as landscape. It will occasion such a radical change, she thinks, that "the current bones will

not accommodate the marrow of the device" (198). When describing the second elevation, she struggles to suggest a suitably otherworldly image: "The shining city will possess untold arms and a thousand eyes, mutability itself, constructed of yet-unconjured plastics" (198). This new architecture will be fluid, ever shifting, open to new possibilities and to change.

However, Fulton's most radical vision of the future proposes not a new landscape but a new method of communication. His most significant statement—"*There is another world beyond this one*" (63, italics original)—holds the two possibilities in tension. While it seems to say that the perfect elevator will usher in a utopian world in the future (far "beyond" the world that Lila Mae knows), it might also mean that Fulton's new device will allow access to an undiscovered way of being that already exists in the present (where it lies hidden "beyond" apparent realities). In volume II of *Theoretical Elevators*, Fulton no longer emphasizes technological innovations that the black box will initiate but focuses instead on the ability of the perfect elevator to create emotional and linguistic transformations. To illustrate his idea, he describes two people waiting for a train who are unable to articulate what they want to say to each other before one departs. In this scenario "an elevator is a train. . . . The perfect elevator waits while its human freight tries to grab through the muck and find the words. In the black box, this messy business of human communication is reduced to excreted chemicals, understood by the soul's receptors and translated into true speech" (86-7). In this new world people do not speak but intuit. They no longer rely on imprecise, mutually unintelligible languages that are

"messy." Instead, spiritual receptors sense the thoughts of others and serve as the means by which people exchange ideas. Intuition becomes "true speech"; in its purest form it is "communication with what is not-you," a simple but revolutionary concept (241). Here Fulton sees the black box not as an invention but as the discovery of a way to enhance our ability to relate to each other.

Whitehead shows that this "true speech" is available not in some future but in the unified now, a piece of the future that can be achieved in the present. It is already at work in a scene at the Happyland Dime-a-Dance, a club where Lila Mae takes refuge as she runs from thugs trying to keep her from acquiring the blueprints (216-7). She dances with the only black man, an elderly gentleman, but refuses to take his money. As they move together, both find "shelter, a polite warmth" even though he never speaks and she utters only three words. Lila Mae becomes "his wife, his daughter, that old sweetheart, all lost now," and he silently cries. His presence somehow makes it possible for her to communicate with "someone who is not her partner now but who is dead and will not answer except in what remains of him." Although he is never revealed, readers immediately suspect that it is either Fulton or Natchez, who has just revealed his deception and his real identity to her. Although Lila Mae's conversation with her private "ghost" is vague and circular, she finds that it brings her comfort and a measure of satisfaction. Silently she asks, "Why did you do it?" and he responds cryptically, "You'll understand." When she protests that she will never understand, he replies, "You already do." The narrator implies that encounters like these approach an alternate reality that lies

just beneath the visible surface: "She has been leading them in an irregular square [on the dance floor], repeating the pressure in this one area as if repetition will make them real, *wear down the barrier into the next world*" (216-7, emphasis added). *There is another world beyond this one*, Fulton believes, and in cathartic moments of transcendent communication, Lila Mae begins to access it.

In fact, she comes to see that Intuitionism—the philosophy that Fulton used to conceive the black box—is entirely about accessing that world that hovers just out of reach in the present. Although she knows of only white Intuitionists and at least one black Empiricist, both she and Fulton view Intuitionism as a racially inflected philosophy that is "postrational, innate. Human" (238). In contrast, she observes that "[w]hite people's reality is built on what things appear to be—that's the business of Empiricism" (239). Fulton held a similar view according to his maid, a black woman named Mrs. Rogers: "He told me—these are his words—'They were all slaves to what they could see.'" Then she adds her own comment, "But there was a truth behind that they couldn't see for the life of them" (239). Unlike Empiricism, Intuitionism taps into what is *present* but not readily *apparent*, and, in Lila Mae's mind, it requires skills that are particularly suited to people of color. Intuitionism helped Fulton "pierce the veil of this world and discover the elevator world" and the black box, which is "the elevator-citizen for the elevator world" (100). The language here evokes an image that W. E. B. DuBois used in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1901). In its first chapter he refers to the veil that separates African Americans both from hegemonic culture and from a concept of self outside the prejudices

of that culture.[24] Because of this veil, he says, African Americans have developed a "double consciousness" as members of a racial minority and as Americans. By drawing on DuBois's ideas, Whitehead hints that the ability to sense two realities at once—the world as it is and the world that could be—that is at the heart of Intuitionism is already fundamental to black consciousness. Thus, the conditions of marginalization grant special access to the future that is layered within the unified now.

This suggestion—that multiple realities exist in the unified now—is bolstered by *The Intuitionist*'s odd historical setting, which resists clear delineations between past, present, and future. On one hand, the novel is set in New York City as seen through the lens of a noir detective novel.[25] Men wear pinstriped suits and fedoras (17), mobsters with names like Johnny Shush bribe government officials, and an inscrutable heroine tries to solve two mysteries. Although Whitehead does not give an exact date, the general time period is circumscribed by two specific events that are referenced in the text. One is the 19th amendment ratified in 1920 and the other is the Civil Rights movement of the

---

[24] In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois writes of a moment in his childhood, "Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing but shut out from their world by a vast veil" (364). Here the veil signifies a separation from white Americans. Elsewhere, however, it references a separation from the self rather than others. In his discussion of how the focus of African American politics shifted from abolition to the demand for education, DuBois depicts the journey toward education: it "changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect. In those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself,--darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission" (368).

[25] See Tucker for a brief but useful explanation of how *The Intuitionist* participates in the noir genre (152).

1960s. A young reporter remembers his mother "paint[ing] placards arguing for a woman's right to vote" (70). Also, the overt racial discrimination and the use of the term "colored" indicate that the Civil Rights movement has not yet taken place. In fact, integration has barely begun (23), but the Great Migration of black men and women from the rural South to the urban North has been underway for some time (161). These historical markers point to a time setting in the late 1930s or early 1940s, but Whitehead includes other references that could not possibly fit into that time frame. In a scene rife with cultural allusions, a band wearing white tuxedos with blue ruffled shirts characteristic of the 1970s performs at a banquet. They sing "Peggy Sue," a song released in 1958. The entertainment also includes a minstrel act, evoking the early 1900s or even earlier. At one point Whitehead refers to Martin Luther King Jr., the "famous reverend . . . so loud down South" (248), who rose to national prominence in the late 1950s. Lila Mae also mentions "last summer's riots" (23). This comment simultaneously evokes the Harlem Riots of 1935, the civil rights movement of the late '50s and '60s, and, as Michael Bérubé suggests (169), even the Los Angeles riots of 1992. Several critics have glossed over the novel's vague setting, sometimes supplying a place and time for the story even though Whitehead deliberately frustrates all attempts to do so. Lauren Berlant, for instance, says the novel is set "around 1964" (850). Such specificity does not adequately recognize Whitehead's purposeful mix of past, present, and future into a single entity. By refusing to pinpoint a specific time, the author represents a fluid

temporality in which his characters access past events and utopian futures in the unified now.

Late in the novel, Lila Mae makes a discovery that threatens to upend her pursuit of the black box and whatever future it contains. She learns that Fulton originally created Intuitionism as a joke on white hegemonic culture. Instead of emerging from his enlightened intellect as she had thought, it served as an outlet for his frustration with racial hierarchies that forced him to pose as a white man in order to be successful. He crafted a bitter, sarcastic riposte to the racism, injustice, and oppression of his time. Lila Mae realizes that Fulton had never conceived a plan for utopia:

> Now she could see Fulton for what he was. There was no way he believed in transcendence. His race kept him earthbound . . . . There was no hope for him as a colored man because the white world will not let a colored man rise, and there was no hope for him as a white man because it was a lie. He secretes his venom into the pages of a book. He knows the other world he describes does not exist. There will be no redemption because the men who run this place do not want redemption (240).

However, Lila Mae softens her attitude when she makes yet another surprising discovery. Fulton changed his mind about the black box and began to believe the joke at some point between the publication of his first two volumes of *Theoretical Elevators*. In Volume II he began to think of the perfect elevator as a viable possibility. Against all reason he transformed his pessimism and bitterness into hope. A visit from his estranged family

apparently precipitated his conversion. Connecting with them once again reshaped his outlook: "Now he wants that perfect elevator that will lift him away from here and devises solid method from his original satire. What did his sister say to him. What did he wish after their meeting. Family? That there could be, in the world he invented to parody his enslavers, a field where he could be whole? A joke has no purpose if you cannot share it with anyone" (241). Fulton's family provides a community with whom he can share his joke—a joke born of despair—and his laughable idea inexplicably creates the space in which to imagine the unimaginable, a perfect elevator that will alter the cultural and physical landscape.

While the black box offers a future of exciting and sometimes improbable possibilities, Lila Mae may not be the person to bring them to fruition even though she locates Fulton's blueprints and vows to realize his vision. The novel's final paragraph consists of five sentences: "She returns to the work. She will make the necessary adjustments. It will come. She is *never wrong. It's her intuition*" (255, emphasis added). But readers know that Lila Mae *has* been wrong: she draws the wrong conclusions about why an elevator crashes, and she misreads Natchez and allows him to use her for his own gain. Readers are left to wonder if she can carry out her plans even though she is a dedicated and determined Intuitionist. Perhaps even more concerning is that she ends up with the blueprints because of a random comment that Fulton jotted down in one of his notebooks: "*Lila Mae Watson is the one*" (253, italics original). Although they never met, she and others assume that Fulton felt connected to her as a fellow African American, but

the narrator reveals that Fulton wrote the note absentmindedly when he saw her studying late one night across the college campus where he lived. She has no insider knowledge about him; he immediately "dismiss[ed] her from his mind" (253). Whoever Fulton envisioned coming to retrieve his blueprints, he likely did not have Lila Mae in mind. But she has enough confidence for both of them, and her devotion to bringing his vision to life serves as a model for Whitehead's notion that we might use the utopian future to inspire work in the present. It is worth noting, however, that the novel remains vague about what this "work" might entail: *The Intuitionist* offers no clear plan for galvanizing political engagement; nevertheless, it finds value in a mental and temporal reorientation toward the unified now.

***Long Division*: Time Traveling through the Present**

Unlike *The Intuitionist*, *Long Division* is firmly situated in a particular and recognizable historical moment. In post-Katrina Mississippi, 14-year-old City Coldson enters the national Can You Use That Word in a Sentence competition after tying for the state title with his classmate and sometimes-friend LaVander Peeler. They must vie with contestants from other states to construct a correct, appropriate, and "dynamic" sentence within two minutes of receiving a particular word (7). For example, LaVander's first word is *lascivious* and his answer is "If lascivious photographs of Amber Rose were found on Mr. White's office computer, then the odds are higher than the poverty rate in the Mississippi Delta that Mr. Jay White would still keep his job at the college his great-

great-grandfather founded" (37). Besides LaVander, City, and two Chicano students from Arizona, all of the other participants are white.

The contest was originally founded to counteract the "geographica[l] bia[s]" of the national Scripps Spelling Bee (7), but despite its good intentions it promotes the bogus claims of the post-racial era. The organizers work to give the minority participants a false sense of equality, inclusion, and achievement that obscures racial asymmetry. When LaVander and City win the state competition, the video of them leaving the stage is superimposed over a number of disheartening images: "In the backdrop of us walking were old images of folks in New Orleans, knee deep in toxic water. These pictures shifted to shots of Trayvon Martin in a loose football uniform, then oil off the coast drowning ignorant ducks" (9). These images reference the effects of institutionalized racism: the poor majority-black population that was devastated by Hurricane Katrina, the legal shooting of an unarmed black teenager, and the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill that destroyed the Gulf Coast and the fishing industry that employs many people of color. Other photographs in the montage include those of James Anderson, victim of a racially motivated hate crime in Mississippi, and "dusty-looking teenagers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee" protesting for civil rights in the 1960s (9). City and LaVander's success is placed into a historical narrative of racial violence and juxtaposes their victory against the past of racial victimization. Their achievement is unproblematically viewed as a triumph after a long line of setbacks for African Americans.

City and LaVander find a similar kind of condescension when they participate in the national contest that is televised live and broadcast globally. To "make [the two African American contestants] as comfortable as possible," backstage manager Cindy provides them with cornbread and Rocawear shirts (30, 34). The organizers allow City to carry his wave brush onstage because they "understan[d] cultural difference" (34). Just before the competition begins, LaVander overhears Cindy telling another worker "to change the final order and let the tall one [LaVander] beat the Mexican girl [Stephanie] because the fat one [City] was going to be difficult" (200). To ensure that City will fail, he is given the word *niggardly* in a sentence. City immediately sees that he has been set up "because it just didn't seem right that any kid like me should have to use a word like that, not in front of all those white folks" (37). He makes a scene on stage and storms off. At the end of the competition when only two contestants remain, the announcer gives Stephanie the difficult word *cacodoxy*, which she misuses as expected. He offers LaVander the "black word" *chitterlings*, which he assumes LaVander cannot fail to use properly since it is a type of soul food popular in African American communities (32). Watching the final round on television at home, City realizes that the participation of the four minority students in the competition was not predicated on their skill but on the appeasement of white culture: "The only way they could feel good about themselves was if they let us win against the Mexican kids, because they didn't believe any of us could really compete. Yeah, we were all decoration in a way" (43). The contest, then, is another manifestation of manufactured progress, a part of a narrative that white Americans tell

themselves so that they can appear to have overcome racism. As such, it must end in the preordained victory of a black student. When LaVander constructs a correct sentence, the announcer is quick to remind viewers of the political significance of his triumph: "LaVander Peeler, you have done the unbelievable! Times are a-changing and you, you exceptional young Mississippian, are a symbol of the American Progress. The past is the past and *today can be tomorrow*" (43, emphasis added). His words epitomize the attitude of a post-racial era: *The future is here; race doesn't matter; we did it!* But LaVander, insulted, insists that he did not finish his sentence and completes it so that he clearly uses the word *chitterlings* improperly. His actions prompt City to declare him a "black superhero on stage" for refusing to participate in the charade (45).

Reeling from the rigged competition and sent to stay with his grandmother on the Mississippi coast, City dives into a book he borrowed from his school principal. Called *Long Division*,[26] the text immediately seems familiar: it also features a 14-year-old black protagonist named City Coldson, who lives in 1985. Like 2013 City, he goes to visit his grandmother in the small coastal town of Melahatchie, Mississippi. Immediately 2013 City is entranced by the book's use of language and its connection to his own life, which he has never felt before with other works of literature because "you could just tell that whoever wrote the sentences in those books never imagined they'd be read by Grandma, Uncle Relle, LaVander Peeler, my cousins, or anyone I'd ever met" (103). Such a book is

---

[26] In this chapter I call this novel-within-a-novel "*Long Division* II" to distinguish it from Laymon's book.

dangerous and disorienting. City both "love[s]" and "fear[s]" it; it makes him "feel strange and lightweight afraid to keep reading" (30). When City's principal lends him the book, she warns him of its power: "Be careful with that. . . . Some books can completely change how we see ourselves and everything else in the world" (19). By the end of Laymon's novel, 2013 City believes that *Long Division* II—the "realest book [he's] ever read"—contains "all we needed to know about how to survive, how to live, and how to love in Mississippi" (198, 267). For these characters, the novel-within-a-novel serves as a kind of guidebook: they explicitly see it as relevant to their experience in a way that other books have not been and feel that it contains important lessons about existing in a post-racial era.

The chief lesson of *Long Division* II is its paradoxical approach to temporality, which Laymon emphasizes through its time travel plot. In the book 1985 City learns that his friend Shalaya Crump has found a hatch buried in the woods that acts as a portal that transports them back to 1964 and forward to 2013. Time travel narratives imply a certain temporal logic that separates past, present, and future, viewing them as distinct entities that one can visit. These types of plots often use particular objects or technologies to distinguish the different time periods; clearly from one era, these items are anachronistic in another. A laptop computer belongs in 2013 just as a rotary phone belongs in 1964. Dipesh Chakrabarty explains that anachronism works only if one "see[s] the past as genuinely dead, as separate from the time of the observer" (*Provincializing* 243). Like

time travel itself, anachronism requires that the past seem *finished*. Things belong to a *then and there* that is clearly not the *here and now*.

But *Long Division* II scrambles this logic: as in *The Intuitionist*, time in *Long Division* II exists as a unified now rather than as a line from past to future. As the characters toggle back and forth between decades, the distinctions between them grow increasingly blurry. Items that should be anachronisms are not; things that should seem out of place are in fact part of an accurate representation of the present. In 2013 City steals a laptop, and he takes it with him to 1964. Having no means to defend himself when he is accosted by Ku Klux Klansmen[27] wearing white sheets, he distracts them by offering them the laptop (162). The image of the KKK with a laptop contains elements of humor—as the computer blares Outkast's "Hey Ya," everyone takes a break from racially-motivated violence to dance—but it is also a serious commentary on 2013. The KKK with a laptop is actually *not* an example of anachronism; it is simply a description of reality since the organization is alive and well in Mississippi and elsewhere.[28] Similarly, City is disturbed when he sees firsthand the effects of separate-but-equal segregation. He is appalled by the sign on a filthy restroom: "It said 'colored' on the [bathroom] door, but it might as well have said cats, spiders, possums, coons, and roaches, 'cause it was open to them just like it was open to us" (143). Such overt racism

---

[27] Actually, the Klansmen in this scene are Jews who have been forced by members of the KKK to impersonate them.

[28] For instance, the KKK surfaced in my hometown in Louisiana in February 2015, leaving printed notes on doors that announced to all residents that the organization had taken on the neighborhood watch duties for that particular area. See Gregory.

should seem shocking, but the novel reminds readers that it is not specific to 1964. At one point City remembers an incident in 1984 when his friend Rozier died in a particularly brutal racially-motivated beating (190-1). Furthermore, he learns that he and Shalaya die in 2005 in Hurricane Katrina, a disaster made infinitely worse by widespread institutional racism. Although it appears that City moves back and forth between a racist past (1964) and a less-racist future (2013), the novel suggests that such distinctions between past and future are impossible. To suggest that the markers of racism—segregated bathrooms, the KKK, hate crimes—belong solely to another time period is to ignore the realities of the present. *Long Division* II tells the story of travel across time and movement *within* a single present.

For Laymon, time travel does not require a magical portal but an imagination and a willingness to explore the ways in which the current moment is overlaid with pasts and futures. That "time travel" is possible within our present is emphasized narratologically as the clear separation between the "real" world of *Long Division* and the fictional world of *Long Division* II breaks down. To help readers, the two books are visually delineated in the texts with different fonts. And, although they both feature City as a main character, the two boys do not share the same personality or the same friends. Despite their differences, however, the narratives begin to collide, and characters overlap. As 2013 City reads *Long Division* II, he is surprised to see a name he recognizes in the story. Thirteen-year-old Baize Shephard, who has recently disappeared in Melahatchie, is the object of an intense missing-persons search. In fact, the sentence contest begins with a

moment of silence for her. In *Long Division* II, 1985 City meets her on one of his trips to the future, and she eventually travels through time with him. Two important facts concerning Baize gradually emerge: she is the daughter of 1985 City and his wife Shalaya, and her disappearance in real-world 2013 is caused by her mother's decision to live permanently in 1964. Shalaya hopes the move will allow her to follow her dream of "chang[ing] the future dot dot dot in a special way" (21), but as a consequence of her decision, she can neither marry 1985 City nor have his children. For that reason Baize gradually weakens and then disappears from the world of both *Long Division* and *Long Division* II. There are other overlaps between the two fictional realms: for instance, at the end of the novel, a true-false test that 2013 City takes in the first chapter is handed back to 1985 City as his own (256-7). One of the questions on the quiz serves as a lesson for readers about the "message" of *Long Division* II: "Past, present, and future exist within you, and you change them by changing the way you live your life" (257). 2013 City marks it "true," and Laymon seems to agree. The time travel plot of the novel-within-a-novel is not an escapist fantasy but a politically engaged exploration of the various pasts and futures that exist within the present—an exploration that, Laymon seems to suggest, we can and should undertake right now.

Although Laymon represents time as a unified now, he does not fully abandon the notion of forward progress and the utopian dream of a better tomorrow. In one scene Baize gives her simplistic vision of what could happen one day. She pictures herself as the first white Klansgirl and says she would transform the work of the Klan for good:

instead of lynching African Americans and setting fire to their homes, her "Klan" would promote togetherness. Members "would go town to town with coloring books asking folks who didn't get along to color together. If they didn't color right, they'd have to spit a sixteen-bar freestyle about sheets," presumably referring to the traditional garb of the KKK (240). Like Fulton, Baize dreams of "communication with what is not-you" in her fantasy of togetherness. And like Whitehead, Laymon finds rich possibilities in the way that these simplistic but idealistic visions of the future reorient and revitalize his characters. His characters travel through time not for fun but because they want to save others, save themselves, and "change the future by changing the past" (134).

But Laymon refuses to spell out the process by which their time travel creates these changes and their dreams become realities; he celebrates their naïve dreaming *as* naïve dreaming rather than as clear schemata for influencing the future. Just as Whitehead's black box stays a mystery, the effects of Laymon's time travel remain deliberately unexplained.[29] In *Long Division* II Shalaya makes the heartbreaking decision to stay behind in 1964, effectively cancelling Baize's existence in order to change the future. But Laymon reveals only minor changes in the "new" 2013 that result from her decision. Besides Baize's disappearance, the only noticeable difference is the presence of a new structure in Melahatchie, the Lerthon Coldson Civil Rights Museum, which is named for the grandfather of 1985 City who was killed by the KKK in 1964. The

---

[29] In an essay about the process of publishing *Long Division*, Laymon writes that he specifically rejected an editor's request that he "explain how the science fiction works" (*How to Slowly* 138).

museum may seem like a positive change, except that Coldson is a drunk, a "part time loser" in City's words, who probably should not be memorialized or associated with the monumental achievements of black activists (255). Although the time-traveling City claims that he "love[s] the slice of the new Mississippi that [he] see[s]," readers are left to wonder what exactly prompts his positive attitude (260). In a conversation with his grandmother, City asks why his travels through time with Shalaya did not have more of a profound effect: "If we changed the future, how come I'm still here? How come you look the same in 2013 that you did in 1985? . . . Why would my mama and daddy still have me if we changed the future? It just doesn't make sense" (257). By raising but refusing to answer these questions, Laymon shows that the *how* does not matter. The hopefulness—the affective reorientation—that the utopian dream provides is more important than detailing the logistics of its realization.

To some, such a stance may seem dangerously apolitical. Indeed, the concept of utopia is often criticized for being removed from reality and impossible to achieve.[30] But Ernst Bloch, Marxist philosopher of hope, warns against plotting the future too exactly. He argues that such plans make the utopian future seem inevitable and predetermined, conforming to the march of history rather than open to the radical possibility of change. Laymon is careful to show that his characters make decisions that affect the future, but he emphasizes that they cannot predict exactly how. By leaving the inner workings of the

---

[30] See Jameson, *Archaeologies* (xi-9) and Gordon (190-1) for helpful overviews of the tradition and critique of utopian literature.

plot unexplained, Laymon adheres to Bloch's idea that hope must "incorporat[e] the element of chance, without which there can be nothing new" ("Can Hope" 341). Laymon makes a strong case that in order to create unimaginable transformation, we must untether ourselves from that which is *possible*, that which *makes sense*, and seek inspiration for the future in improbable places—like, for example, a time-travel portal deep in the woods of Mississippi.

Rewriting the Future

For all their differences in setting, genre, and style, *The Intuitionist* and *Long Division* end in a strikingly similar way: with their characters separated from the world, reading and writing texts. Laymon's two Citys both retreat into the time-travel portal while Whitehead's Lila Mae moves to a new city and holes up in a new apartment. There she channels Fulton's voice and even adopts his handwriting in an effort to fully comprehend and expand on his vision as she writes *Theoretical Elevators* Volume III. She plans to revise his blueprints as circumstances change and release them publicly "when the time is right" (254). While the novel stops short of representing the future that excites her, it invites readers to imagine what the second elevation might be.

Many critics have read the ending as a hesitation on Whitehead's part, a way of expressing doubts about Lila Mae's ability to usher in a new world. Linda Selzer articulates the uncertainty in the novel's final pages: "Will Fulton's plans for the perfect elevator lead to creation of the quintessential piece of technology that will achieve what

all other human inventions have failed to accomplish? Or will they, as the millennial expectations placed in various technologies over time suggest, represent but another in a long series of mistakes in placing hope in mechanical marvels for humankind's own salvation?" (694). Although I certainly agree that the ending is left ambiguous, I propose that the suspension of the end of the book serves as a final example of *The Intuitionist*'s approach to futurity. Whether or not she is the most qualified to carry out Fulton's vision, Lila Mae does not wait passively for the world to change at some later date. She remains deeply engaged with Fulton's texts, actively "recalibrating" her imagination to match the "optimism" evident in his plans for the black box (254). By leaving Lila Mae in the act of *getting ready*, of adjusting her thinking, Whitehead makes the point that the *process* of creating the future is important—more important even than obsessively marking the steps toward its realization. Further, he emphasizes that texts serve a crucial role in encouraging this process: they forge connections across time, creating a communal space that links a network of minds that can continue to work through the questions and problems of the present together.

Laymon makes this point even more emphatically in *Long Division*. For him, reading and writing have the power not only to transport us across time but also to resurrect the dead and make them live again on paper. In *Long Division* II, after Baize disappears so that Shalaya can stay in 1964, City searches for a way to bring his daughter back to life. To help him, his grandmother briefly shows up in 2013 with Baize's computer in her hand. She tells her grandson, "We live, we wonder, we love, we lie, and

we disappear. . . . And sometimes we appear again if we're loved" (257-8). She prompts City to understand that, because "people make people disappear," they can also make them reappear (260). Then she gives him the computer and commissions him to start working: "It's all in your hands now" (260). City finds that he is "ready to explore, knowing that I'd done new things with my hands and new things with my imagination" (261). He starts typing and immediately sees that "the more [he] wrote and erased, the more [he] felt Baize and other characters slowly—word by word, maybe even sense by sense—coming back" (261). At the end of *Long Division* II, City, who had been writing in the time-travel portal alone, realizes the power of his own writing as he begins to sense the presence of others. Although their identities are never revealed to the reader, they could be Baize, Shalaya, Rozier, or even the real-world characters of 2013 City and LaVander Peeler. Whoever they are, they comfort City and begin to communicate with him: "Slowly, we opened our red eyes in the dark and taught each other how to love. Hand in hand, deep in the underground of Mississippi, we all ran away to tomorrow because we finally could" (263). City imagined that "tomorrow," dreamed his companions back to life, and created a space for the future he wanted. *Long Division* ends similarly, as LaVander and 2013 City find the time-travel portal in the woods and, once inside, begin to reread *Long Division* II together, knowing that the book holds the key to "all we needed to know about how to survive, how to live, and how to love in Mississippi . . . The *sentences* had always been there" (267, emphasis added). Laymon brings their story full circle: rather than crafting and performing sentences for white audiences in the

Can You Use That Word in a Sentence competition, these teenagers are writing their own lives and futures in *Long Division*.

For Laymon the acts of reading and writing perform reparative work that can overcome the painful distances of time and space that separate his characters; this view, I should point out, shares affinities with the radical archival practice that I discussed in Chapter 1. The words 1985 City writes re-connect him to Baize while Baize's reading connects her to the characters in yet another version of *Long Division*, which seems to feature 2013 City and LaVander as characters. She tells her father that, if she were writing the novel, "We'd all be inside the book . . . with those other characters already in the book and we'd all fall in love with each other" (245). It is these links across time that must be established before it is possible to imagine any real progress toward a new future. Links are also implied in the phrase "long division," a term Shalaya uses to mean that people must "show all [their] work," "tell . . . all the background," and "really pause at each step" to take full account of the process rather than jumping straight to the answer (56). Laymon uses the ellipsis mark throughout his story to indicate that this work is never finished. Characters in both *Long Division* and *Long Division* II place significance on the punctuation: LaVander Peeler has three dots tattooed on his arm (7), Baize uses it in her rhymes (74-5), and Shalaya regularly inserts "dot dot dot" into her sentences (21). As Baize explains, "The ellipsis always knows something more came before it and something more is coming after it" (245). It is thus the mark of the unified now, an image that contains past, present, and future within it. As Shalaya Crump says, the punctuation

lingers (56), but it also *anticipates*. *Long Division* II ends with the marks, indicating that the story continues to be written.

Both *The Intuitionist* and *Long Division* belong to a group of texts that, according to Ramón Saldívar, are attempting to create a "new aesthetic to deal with the meaning of race in our supposedly postrace era" (3).[31] He suggests that these novels apply the strategies of speculative fiction (including magical realism, science fiction, and fantasy) to considerations of race, paradoxically creating a "weird kind of realism" that attempts to represent the fluctuating status of American racial identity (13-4). Saldívar argues that, because of their interest in exploring the nature of contemporary racial dynamics, these novels are not concerned with "whether fantasy can effect access to . . . real political change" (14). In fact, he claims that asking this question is "beside the point and in fact part of the misapprehension concerning the working of fiction that contemporary authors like Whitehead are attempting to address" (14). But I contend that these fantastical stories are in fact deeply invested in revitalizing the political imagination through their distinctive conception of futurity and renewed commitment to certain forms of utopian dreaming. *The Intuitionist* and *Long Division* theorize a more complex version of West's "blues hope": theirs is a forward-looking view that never loses faith that social change will be realized. At the same time, in response to the constant pressure to chart progress, these texts find value in *lingering*, in taking the time to get there, in putting in the effort

---

[31] Saldívar specifically includes *The Intuitionist* in his analysis of what he calls "postrace" novels. Although *Long Division* was published after his article appeared, it includes all of the features that he uses to define the genre.

to dream and revise those dreams, in delaying the “solution” in favor of performing the all-important long division.

CHAPTER 3

DEEP TIME AND THE SCALE OF HISTORY

IN *POINT OMEGA* AND *OH PURE AND RADIANT HEART*

After historians choose their subjects and start to craft their accounts of the past, each must make a crucial decision about where to begin. For example, a description of the events of Hurricane Katrina, the powerful storm that ravaged New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in August 2005, might begin with the moment the storm made landfall or with the measures taken (and not taken) to prepare for the hurricane. It might include background that explains the cultural and economic factors, centuries in the making, which led government agencies to neglect thousands of people both before and after the storm. Or it might focus on the natural forces that created the hurricane, outlining the recent changes in climate that are likely responsible for more intense storms like Katrina, or going further back to consider the formation of Earth's atmosphere eons ago that could shed light on current climatic developments.

This decision, ultimately, is about *scale*. An account of the past might be narrated at the scale of personal time, measured in days and decades; historical time, measured in centuries and millennia; or planetary or cosmic time, measured in millions of years. These distinctions are necessarily imprecise and provisional. What I describe as personal and historical time usually fall under the broader category of "human time," since both are calibrated to the scale of human civilization and existence. The temporal models

presented in the previous chapters operate at the intersection of personal and historical time since they offer methods for individuals to interact with a past and a future that exceed their own lifespans. But their visions do not take into consideration the time scale of the universe, which remains an unconventional option for most writers. Although some natural historians in the late-18th- and early-19th-centuries took a cosmic perspective, this approach fell out of favor until recently, when growing awareness of climate change has brought it back into focus.[32] It is only by taking this longest view that we can begin to grasp the threat posed by climatic disturbance, an urgent danger often met with cultural apathy. In this chapter I show that some contemporary texts have begun to contemplate a significantly expanded time scale, presenting creative visions that tap into nearly unfathomable pasts and futures. I read Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010) and Lydia Millet's *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* (2005) as two novels that together help us glimpse the political and social implications of re-scaling our historical imagination. As these texts represent it, placing *homo sapiens* in the context of the history of the cosmos—decentering the human in order to focus on the universe as a whole—requires coming to terms with both the influence and the insignificance of humanity.

To suggest that the historical imagination take into account the 13.7 billion years since the Big Bang—what geologists call "deep time"—is to reconfigure the discipline of history. From such a perspective, human history seems relatively insignificant because

---

[32] Two exemplary texts by natural historians that consider the cosmic scale are *Histoire Naturelle, Générale et particulière* (1749-88) by Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon and *Kosmos* (1845-62) by Alexander von Humboldt.

our species has existed only a short time in comparison to the universe. John McPhee, the journalist usually credited with coining the term "deep time" in 1982, explains, "Consider the earth's history as the old measure of the English yard, the distance from the king's nose to the tip of his outstretched hand. One stroke of a nail file on his middle finger erases human history" (qtd. in Gould 3). To bring the human past into focus, historians have traditionally limited their texts to an account of civilization, examining only those periods that can be studied through written documents. A notable exception to this practice is the recent "big history" movement, which provides narratives of the past "from the Big Bang to now" (see Brown, e.g.). Although not widespread, this movement has gained traction as scientists like Stephen Hawking and historians like David Christian have campaigned for individuals to expand their worldviews and consider time on a much larger scale in order to better understand our place in the universe. For most historians, however, every development that occurred before cities were established in Mesopotamia qualifies as "prehistory" or "natural history" and is most often left to anthropologists, paleontologists, and geologists.[33]

Focusing on human actions often means de-emphasizing nature, which may only serve as a backdrop against which history happens. The tacit assumption in most

---

[33] Daniel Lord Smail provides several reasons why this break between human and natural history occurred, including the trend toward disciplinary specialization and the Enlightenment concept of human exceptionalism. More provocatively, he suggests that the "short chronology" of the discipline of history is a product of the nearly invisible but still powerful influence of sacred history. He suggests that beginning accounts of the history of humankind with Mesopotamian civilization, as most historians do, is simply a transposition of the Biblically-informed histories popular in the nineteenth century that calculated the Earth itself as only 6000 years old (12-39).

mainstream historical accounts is that "man's environment . . . changed so slowly as to make the history of man's relation to his environment almost timeless and thus not a subject of historiography at all" (Chakrabarty, "Climate" 204). Even Fernand Braudel, an influential historian who advocated analyzing the *longue durée* of history, made a significant distinction between human and natural histories: "There is . . . a history slower still than the history of civilizations, a history which almost stands still, a history of man in his intimate relationship to the earth which bears and feeds him . . . which may and does change superficially, but which goes on, tenaciously, as though it were somehow beyond time's reach and ravages" (12). The scale of cosmic time, in other words, is too long, too stretched-out, to register the events of human history, which covers only a brief period.

Or so we thought. Noting the disastrous effects that human activities have had on biophysical systems for more than a century, chemist Paul Crutzen proposed in 2002 that our actions have ushered in a new epoch, the Anthropocene.[34] Humans have long affected the Earth's ecosystem, but the defining characteristic of this geologic period is the unprecedented severity and magnitude of our impact on the planet as a whole: increased erosion, heightened global temperature levels, extinctions of plants and animals at an accelerated rate, and the acidification of oceans, among other harmful effects (Zalasiewicz et al. 5-6). Many scientists date the origins of the Anthropocene to the

---

[34] Although Crutzen is credited with popularizing the designation *Anthropocene*, he borrowed the term from biologist Eugene Stoermer, who had employed it informally since the 1980s. See Steffen et al. for a review of the history of the epoch's denomination (843-5).

Industrial Revolution of the early nineteenth century, when the widespread use of coal by burgeoning industries led to an increased concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Others claim that the epoch started in the 1950s, during the "Great Acceleration" that included an explosion of population and the worldwide movement toward industrialization after World War II, both of which strained the planet's resources with ever-increasing force (Steffen et al.). Processes that would normally occur over millions of years have taken place within a few decades. In short, human activity has registered in planetary time. With the new designation of the Anthropocene, we are faced with a troubling collision of different time scales that forces us as individuals not only to reckon with our effect on the deep past but also to face the distant future and the certainty of our own extinction.

Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that this collision requires a revision of the historical enterprise. While the practice of history usually entails describing the experience of individuals at particular places in particular times—carefully acknowledging the differences *among* humans—the Anthropocene forces us to confront the idea that humans are also a *species* that affects Earth's geologic and climatic conditions. Chakrabarty points out the chief difficulty in performing this kind of "species thinking": "To call ourselves geological agents is to attribute to us a force on the same scale as that released at other times when there has been a mass extinction of species" ("Climate" 213, 207). In short, "to call human beings geological agents is to scale up our imagination of the human" ("Climate" 206). Further, the knowledge that as a species humans are slowly

making their own environment uninhabitable upsets the past-present-future continuum upon which historical understanding relies: "[T]he current crisis can precipitate a sense of the present that disconnects the future from the past by putting such a future beyond the grasp of historical sensibility" ("Climate" 197). By slowly creating a future in which humanity is extinct, we are essentially writing ourselves out of history. "Thus, our usual historical practices . . . are thrown into a deep contradiction and confusion" ("Climate" 198).

A cluster of contemporary authors has begun to contemplate this space of contradiction and confusion, infusing their fictional worlds with a profound sense of deep time and taking seriously the prospect of human extinction in order to expand the historical imagination.[35] Writers who explore the perspective of elongated time face several challenges, chief among them how to represent different temporal scales aesthetically and how to treat them thematically. Mark McGurl has recently identified a distinct genre of literary works that he calls *posthuman comedies*. These are texts "in which scientific knowledge of the spatiotemporal vastness and numerousness of the nonhuman world becomes visible as a formal, representational, and finally existential

---

[35] Aside from the novels by DeLillo and Millet that I treat in this chapter, I would point to the work of Margaret Atwood (The MaddAddam Trilogy, 2003, 2009, 2013), Ursula Le Guin (*Always Home*, 1985), Jeff VanderMeer (*Annihilation*, 2014), and Jeanette Winterson (*The Stone Gods*, 2007). Millet's recently published trilogy—*How the Dead Dream* (2008), *Ghost Lights* (2011), and *Magnificence* (2012)—is explicitly centered on the theme of extinction. Mark McGurl suggests that horror has been "the genre . . . most responsive to the hard fact of deep time" (542). He considers novels and short stories from a variety of periods including those by Italo Calvino, H.P. Lovecraft, Olaf Stapledon, and Horace Walpole.

problem" (537).[36] In McGurl's view, posthuman comedies almost always communicate "spatiotemporal vastness" as *horror* because they acknowledge not only the deep past but also the deep future and "the virtual certainty of extinction" (538). McGurl suggests that such works are doomed to be aesthetic failures due to the difficulties in dealing with unthinkable concepts and in modifying narrative genres that were developed to depict events on the human scale (541-2). Fiction is fundamentally "anthropocentric" and thus is not well equipped to explore the expanse of the cosmos (McGurl 548).

Taking on the imaginative challenges articulated by Chakrabarty and McGurl, DeLillo and Millet find distinctive ways to generate a consideration of an expanded time scale by depicting not exactly deep time itself but the process by which we come to perceive it. I begin with a reading of *Point Omega* because it raises two important questions for both this chapter and my dissertation as a whole: How does aesthetic representation bring us to new understandings of time? And how might that aestheticized understanding translate to real-life situations or events? The novel begins and ends by detailing a character's experience of an art installation that helps him (and readers) to grasp the disorienting perspective of deep time. DeLillo's concern with how art might awaken temporal awareness motivates my reading of *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*, a text that revisits the image and aesthetics of the atomic bomb to explore the concept of scale. The ambivalence of the novel's imaginative view of the bomb, I argue, provides a

---

[36] Several scholars have pointed out that McGurl's term is a misnomer: there is nothing funny about these "posthuman comedies." (See Dimock, "Low Epic" for a pointed critique.)

powerful analog to the experience of living in the Anthropocene: just as the atomic bomb signified the culmination of human endeavor and the possibility of total destruction, the newly-identified epoch simultaneously designates the ascendance and the annihilation of the human race. We have mastered the geologic record, ensuring that it will forever retain a mark of our existence, but the price for that "achievement" is a world that will not sustain us much longer. *Point Omega* and *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* observe that these paradoxical implications of the new era inspire both awe and horror: the vast scale of deep time opens up exciting uncharted epistemological and aesthetic territory that can bring us to environmental consciousness, but it also requires us to face extinction—a fate that their characters find at various turns reassuring and terrifying. I show that the two novels define the experience of the Anthropocene, helping us perceive the consequences of our impact on the planetary time scale; clarify the stakes of temporal reorientation, emphasizing both the creative possibilities and the failures of scaling up; and tentatively prescribe an appropriate response to this encounter with scale, presenting the idea that "progress" might mean accepting the inevitability of extinction. Further, I contend that because of their desire to apprehend deep time through the novelistic qualities of structure and narration, these texts serve as aesthetic experiments that test the role fiction plays in elucidating dissident temporalities.

Seeing Time in *Point Omega*

In *Point Omega*, Jim Finley, an experimental documentary filmmaker, travels to the California desert to meet Richard Elster, a neoconservative scholar who helped orchestrate the 2003 Iraq War. Finley hopes to convince the older man to serve as the subject for his next film. Later, while Elster's adult daughter Jessie is visiting the two men, she mysteriously disappears. This rather thin plot is bookended by two sections in which an unnamed man—probably Jessie's lover and possibly the man responsible for her disappearance—attends a viewing of Douglas Gordon's installation *24-Hour Psycho* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). He is fascinated by the artist's version of the 109-minute Hitchcock classic, which is shown at two frames per second instead of the standard twenty-four. Slowed down, the movie runs for an entire day. DeLillo's account of Gordon's film dramatizes the central challenge of the Anthropocene: how do we as humans begin to grasp a nonhuman or slower-than-human time scale? Through an elongated depiction of *24-Hour Psycho*, the author explores methods that can help us perceive deep time and unfamiliar ways of thinking and seeing that can result from that perception.

DeLillo details the way that the glacial pace of *24-Hour Psycho* defies any attempt to make sense of the film using the strategies that apply to most cinematic productions. The anonymous viewer finds the film to be so distorted that he must struggle to identify familiar reference points: "Could they be called scenes, becalmed as they were, the raw makings of a gesture, the long arc of hand to face?" (102). When Elster and

Finley enter the gallery while they are in New York, the spectator wrongly surmises that they are film professors. He imagines that the two depart quickly because the movie frustrates their expectations: "The action moved too slowly to accommodate their vocabulary of film. . . . They could not feel the heartbeat of images projected at this speed" (10). Even more disorienting than the film's lack of traditional elements is the fact that *24-Hour Psycho* obscures the normal processes by which viewers comprehend narrative. Without meaningful juxtaposition or clearly established cause-and-effect relationships, the audience is lost: "Every action was broken into components so distinct from the entity that the watcher found himself isolated from every expectation" (8). When "cause and effect [are] so drastically drawn apart," the audience is left with no foundation upon which to build an understanding of the images before them (14). At one point another viewer (probably Elster's daughter Jessie although she is never explicitly identified) asks the watcher what is happening onscreen: "Do I want to know who's stabbing him?" (106). Because the information would mean little to her, he answers no. His reply emphasizes the fact that this version of *Psycho* has nothing to do with plot; in fact, it is so disorienting that the second spectator wonders whether the famously suspenseful Hitchcock film is a comedy (111).

By subverting normal sense-making mechanisms, *24-Hour Psycho* encourages viewers to become aware that their perception of meaning is dependent on *time*. Slowing down the speed of the film allows viewers to reflect on the screen images and to examine the procedures they use to process them. The obsessive watcher declares, "This was the

point. To see what's here, finally to look and to know you're looking, to be alive to what is happening in the smallest registers of motion" (6). To absorb a film shown at such a sluggish pace requires extremely sustained attention: "These abstract moments, all form and scale, the carpet pattern, the grain of the floorboards, binding him to total alertness, eye and mind" (101). By forcing the eye to linger over such details, the film makes its audience wonder how much they miss in their everyday lives because things go by so quickly.[37] The elongated film gives viewers a new perspective, allowing them to focus on details that might otherwise be overlooked and to form new ways of extracting meaning. The observer describes his heightened awareness: "It takes close attention to see what is happening in front of you. It takes work, pious effort, to see what you are looking at. He was mesmerized by this, the depths that were possible in the slowing of motion, the things to see, the depths of things so easy to miss in the shallow habit of seeing" (13). He often fixates on one item like a face or a subtle movement, and he declares that a single eye blink is a "revelation" (8).

His careful attention eventually reveals a mistake in the film. In the scene in which Norman Bates kills private detective Milton Arbogast, the observer notices that "there was a clear discrepancy between the action and the visible effect" (103). Although viewers see Bates stab Arbogast in the chest one time, the camera focuses on the man's bloodied face as he tumbles down the stairs. The observer concludes that audiences do

---

[37] Extensive literature suggests that our visual cortex and attention spans have been transformed by the amount of data that we consume every day in the digital age. For a good overview, see Carr.

not notice this inconsistency at the film's normal speed because they draw instantaneous conclusions about the implied actions, instinctively "imagin[ing] a second and third and fourth knife slash" (103). The spectator suggests that twenty-four frames per second is "the speed at which we perceive reality, at which the brain processes images" (103), but he speculates that we cannot catch mistakes at that speed because the brain's visual cortex only has time to respond to part of the data it receives, and it must extrapolate the rest. By forcing viewers to watch a familiar film on a different time scale, the artist reveals a significant but often overlooked truth, one that is at the center of this dissertation: time governs our perceptions of and interactions with other people and events. It is not so much an objective measure of existence as a subjective construct that dictates the way we perceive our world each day. The observer recognizes that changing our time scale provides insight: "Alter the format and expose the flaws" (103). He is concerned, however, that this new perspective may not translate into the world outside the screening room. He ponders what it will be like to leave the gallery after spending the whole day with *24-Hour Psycho*: "Would he be able to walk out into the street after an unbroken day and night of living in this radically altered plane of time? . . . [W]ould it be possible for him to live in the world?" (12-3). It is almost as if the rest of the novel is an answer to this question since it details Elster's struggle to apply his awareness of deep time to historical and personal events—the Iraq War, the disappearance of his daughter—that do not register on a planetary time scale.

Like the anonymous observer who recognizes that the constant necessity of extrapolating data forces us to use our creative faculties to perceive the world, Elster views "human perception" as "a saga of created reality" that individuals produce "with every eyeblink" (28). Reflecting back on his time as a "defense intellectual," he blames the mistakes of the Iraq War on errors in perception (28). Just as Bates' slashes do not match Arbogast's wounds, the reality of the war in Iraq did not coincide with the "abstract" war plotted by military leaders (28). Elster tells Finley that his colleagues moved troops to "a place on a map" even though sometimes "no map existed to match the reality we were trying to create" (28). He faults military leaders for "devising entities beyond the agreed-upon limits of recognition or interpretation" and for "tr[ying] to create new realities overnight" (28). Notably Elster criticizes their time scale: they wanted to effect change *overnight*, conjuring a "new reality" out of thin air and refusing to acknowledge the slower-moving cultural and geopolitical undercurrents that should have impacted their military decisions. He suggests that looking through the lens of a different time scale might have provided greater clarity and a heightened consciousness about the consequences of their actions. His comments about the Iraq War serve as practical confirmation of the watcher's observation about *24-Hour Psycho*: Alter the format and expose the flaws. His thinking inflected by the slowness of deep time, Elster comes to see that the war was a fantasy created by egotistic individuals who wanted to bend the world to their will instead of supporting genuine engagement with political reality.

Whether or not the clarity Elster achieves actually inspires better, more ethical action is left unresolved in the novel. "Alive to the protoworld," Elster is able to develop innovative methods for "thinking and seeing" since he "thinks on a cosmic scale" (20, 29, 47). His sense of deep time leads him to conclude that the conflict in Iraq should have been a "haiku war": "Haiku means nothing beyond what it is. A pond in summer, a leaf in the wind. It's human consciousness located in nature. . . . I wanted a haiku war . . . I wanted a war in three lines. This was not a matter of force levels or logistics. What I wanted was a set of ideas linked to transient things. This is the soul of haiku. . . . Things in war are transient. See what's there and then be prepared to watch it disappear" (29). Instead of a reality created overnight, Elster envisions a war that, like haiku, taps into the rhythms of natural processes that register both constancy and change. This notion of a "haiku war" is central to my reading of the novel for two reasons. First, it represents another attempt by DeLillo (after his examination of *24-Hour Psycho*) to identify an aesthetic form that might help audiences perceive the consequences of deep time. In Elster's description, the haiku paradoxically communicates both transience *and* human consciousness—a consciousness so transcendent that it may even seem to exist outside of time. Further, he believes that the haiku embodies the way that human consciousness is enmeshed in the natural world. These are two concepts—transience and environmental enmeshment—that are fundamental to grasping the human experience of the Anthropocene. Secondly, the concept of a "haiku war" attempts to bring the aesthetic perception of deep time (the poetic form of the haiku) to bear on a specific historical

event (the Iraq War). Although it remains unclear what exactly a haiku war would look like in practice, the idea represents the novel's attempt to accept the challenge the Anthropocene poses: to think human events through the epistemology and scale of deep time.

Elster's acute awareness of deep time also inspires his interest in human extinction, which he envisions as an almost-spiritual transcendence of the body. He borrows from the philosophy of Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who described "the omega point" as the final union of human and divine consciousness. Elster sees this point as the ultimate stage of evolution when humans, having depleted their capacity for consciousness, finally evolve past it. At some point, he imagines, we will take "a leap out of our biology. Ask yourself this question: Do we have to be human forever? Consciousness is exhausted. Back now to inorganic matter. This is what we want. We want to be stones in a field" (53). For Teilhard and for Elster, the human race has evolved steadily from "brute matter [that] becomes analytical human thought" that turns into "[o]ur beautiful complexity of mind" (52). The next logical step is a reversion to a realm "out[side] of being" (73). The omega point, then, is the stage of ultimate perfection toward which humanity has been advancing. This concept shares some affinities with the teleological accounts of progress that the texts throughout my dissertation question. The difference here is that the notion of progress has been stretched to the scale of deep time and in the process redefined so that we are forced to look *past* the traditional goals to see that historical development culminates not in community survival, social equality, or

redemption but in an acceptance of human extinction. Elster, tapped as he is into a planetary viewpoint, sees the end of humanity not as a horrific cataclysm but as a peaceful transition into a different ontological state that will provide welcome relief from the burdensome weight of consciousness. His vision of a world without humans is quite tranquil: "He closed his eyes, silently divining the nature of later extinctions, grassy plains in picture books for children, a region swarming with happy camels and giant zebras, mastodons, sabertooth tigers" (20).

While the novel points toward the possibilities offered by the perspective of deep time—the new ways of seeing human events, the contextualization of humans within the cosmos—it also recognizes the limitations of that view. When Jessie disappears and the police suspect foul play, Elster is devastated. After days of searching, rescuers recover only one item, an abandoned knife that may hold some clue to her fate. Finley observes that the vantage point of deep time offers no comfort to Elster when he is faced with the likelihood of his daughter's death: "I thought of his remarks about matter and being . . . transcendence, paroxysm, the end of human consciousness. It seemed so much dead echo now. Point omega. A million years away. The omega point has narrowed, here and now, to the point of a knife as it enters a body. All the man's grand themes funneled down to local grief, one body, out there somewhere, or not" (98). On the cosmic time scale, DeLillo suggests, the concept of point omega is comforting and sustaining; on the human scale, however, it is horrifying and callous because it requires the end of humanity. For that reason, it provides no insights into the experience of personal tragedy.

The novel's twin focus on Elster's sense of deep time and *24-Hour Psycho* at first seems counterintuitive since it links an artistic work so slow that spectators can "count the gradation in the movement of Anthony Perkins' head" (5) to a spatiotemporal scale so large that it encompasses the birth of the universe.[38] But Elster's cosmic view immediately allows him to perceive the slow pace that connects the film with deep time. For him seeing the movie is "like watching the universe die over a period of about seven billion years. . . . [I]t was like the contraction of the universe. . . . The heat death of the universe" (47). The film, then, represents in visual form the nonhuman perspective that Elster adopts: it not only approximates the elongated scale of deep time but also shows how an expanded temporality disrupts our normal human-focused strategies for making meaning. Narrative, juxtaposition, cause-and-effect, genre—all of these sense-making systems bend when time is stretched out to incomprehensible lengths. Although the immediate result may be distortion and disorientation, DeLillo suggests that scaling up our perspective may ultimately create a useful cognitive friction that can provide access to unfamiliar but valuable methods of determining meaning and perceiving the world.

This cognitive friction—the by-product of the clash between two different temporal systems—forms the center of the Anthropocene experience. McGurl argues that this interplay between scales is what dooms posthuman comedies, which futilely attempt

---

[38] David Cowart adds yet another intriguing layer when he suggests that the experience of watching *24-Hour Psycho* places the viewer at the center of two temporalities. "In the nominal and durational twenty-four hours, its creator literalizes ephemerality. Yet to anyone attempting to watch it through, *24 Hour Psycho* unfolds at a glacial pace" (37).

to represent deep time through genres designed to communicate human events. These texts are often pejoratively labeled genre fiction because literary aesthetic value traditionally aligns with realism, which focuses on "the reasonable-seeming correspondence between representation and ordinary adult perceptual experience" (543). The horror stories of H.P. Lovecraft, to use McGurl's example, represent encounters with the vastness of the nonhuman world that falls outside our consciousness and therefore do not meet the conventional requirements of realism. But *Point Omega* shows that such encounters become necessary in the Anthropocene. That the novel cannot reconcile the planetary and the human—that Elster's philosophical wisdom does not help him cope with the very personal experience of loss and grief—only serves to emphasize the incommensurability of scales at work in the new epoch. Through its ekphrasis of *24-Hour Psycho*, the novel suggests that art may facilitate a new understanding of the intersection of temporalities at which we live. If the measure of aesthetic success is how accurately a novel represents "adult perceptual experience," then *Point Omega* succeeds by redefining the nature of that experience for the Anthropocene.

The End of History in *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*

Elster suggests that humanity's progress toward the omega point is spurred by our own longing for annihilation. As evidence he cites the Iraq War and promises that the "nuclear flirtations we've been having with this or that government" will ultimately morph into yearning for humanity to "lose its self-consciousness" and become "dead

matter" (50). Millet's investigation into deep time in *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* also considers American involvement in Iraq. This shared political context reflects the interest that the two novels have in scaling up their worldview. Both suggest that a war that many perceived as pointless might provide a useful lens through which to view the Anthropocene epoch: a self-destructive desire to make war is not unlike a self-destructive desire to write on the geologic record. Set in March 2003, the month the invasion of Iraq began, Millet's novel features J. Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, and Enrico Fermi, three scientists who worked on the Manhattan Project. They are mysteriously transported to the present seconds after they witness the birth of the atomic bomb on July 16, 1945, at the Trinity Site in New Mexico. Disoriented and confused, they find themselves in present-day Santa Fe, where they are befriended by a librarian. Ann immediately believes in their implausible time-travel, and she and her husband Ben offer them a place to stay. They are the first of many who begin to "follow" the time-travelers: by the end of the novel, when the three men organize a march on Washington for peace and nuclear disarmament, they have amassed hordes of devotees including not only fellow peace activists but also Christian fundamentalists who believe that Oppenheimer is the incarnation of the Second Coming. During their march, however, the scientists' time in the present comes to an abrupt end. Szilard is assassinated by paramilitary forces, and Oppenheimer and Fermi ascend into the heavens with an enormous flock of whooping cranes.

Virtually ignored by critics, *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* develops an ambivalent attitude toward the nuclear age that, I argue, ultimately serves as an exploration of the experience of living in the Anthropocene. In Millet's view the bomb represents both the culmination of human endeavor and its exhaustion. In numinous terms very similar to those Elster uses to describe the omega point, Millet's novel suggests that the bomb represents the final step in the evolution of man: "Before the mushroom cloud there had always been a dream of setting the human spirit free, a dream that the spirit could be loosed from its gates of skin, become airborne, ecstatic, and undone. And here it was at last: the mind of man" (61). The bomb is humanity's ultimate triumph and a symbol of its impending demise. In her 2014 book *The Human Age: The World Shaped by Us*, Diane Ackerman acknowledges that the Cold War era was "the first time I'd heard my elders suggesting that we were now capable of unraveling the whole atmosphere shrouding Earth" because at that time "scientists . . . were talking about nuclear winter, the likely changes in Earth's climate in the aftermath of nuclear war . . . . It seemed a possible scenario, since in Washington and Moscow, politicians were outdaring each other with playground bravado" (8). Like Ackerman, Millet revisits the imagery of the bomb to consider the likelihood that humanity will be the agent of its own destruction.[39] Contemplating the power of the atomic bomb can provide us insight into the

[39] For a helpful review of the historical overlaps between climate science and nuclear weapon development, including their shared technologies and threat scenarios, see Edwards.

contemporary era where we are just coming to terms with the scale of the environmental destruction we have caused.

But Millet's depiction of the bomb does not solely focus on its destructive capabilities. *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* takes great pains to characterize the scientists working on the bomb as conscientious men who genuinely loved knowledge and were inspired to push it to its limits:[40] "[T]hey adored the idea [of the bomb], pursuing it with a devotion they never considered could be anything but virtuous. With their minds they had fastened onto a secret, which went on and on forever and had never before been known" (54). They saw their task of creating the bomb as both a responsibility to scientific progress and a moral duty. By developing the technology quickly, they believed they were putting an end to one conflict and deterring others. More than that, they were inspired by their faith in scientific discovery as a universal good. In fact, the novel ends by reminding readers about the scientists' pure intentions: "They worked [on the Manhattan Project] because they wanted to see; they worked because they worshipped the structure deep within the universe . . . . It was love that led them to the bomb" (453).

For Millet, the atomic bomb opens up both catastrophic and creative possibilities. She is not the first to be inspired by such ambiguities. Paul Boyer reveals in his insightful 1985 study *By the Bomb's Early Light* that as soon as the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, people were immediately struck by its power both to annihilate and to

---

[40] Millet has stated in interviews that she extensively researched the real lives of the three scientists and that her characterizations are intended to be true-to-life (Jernigan).

reconfigure the world. Similarly, David Seed finds the "tensions and ambiguities . . . between the destructive capability of the new bombs and the utopian hopes invested in radioactivity as an energy source" to be a common trope in literary works about the nuclear age (24). Millet says that *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* was inspired by the interplay between these kinds of dualities. She refers to the "terrible beauty" of the bomb and all that it symbolizes—man's power over nature, the zenith of scientific invention, and cataclysmic force—as the "nuclear sublime" (Jernigan; Cheney).[41]

This concept is clearly at work in the novel's opening lines: "In the middle of the twentieth century three men were charged with the task of removing the tension between minute and vast things. It was their job to rend asunder the smallest unit of being known to be separable from itself; out of a particle so modest there are billions in a single tear, in a moment so brief it could not be perceived, they would make the finite infinite" (3). As Millet's polarized language indicates, the aesthetics of the atomic bomb imply a convergence of opposites: invisible and immense, imperceptible and unavoidable. Her description, at once appealing and terrifying, reflects these dualities. To make the finite infinite sounds romantic and desirable, but it requires an unnatural clash of separate scales. An analysis of *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* reveals that the Trinity Test was a

---

[41] "Nuclear sublime" is a term first used by literary scholar Frances Ferguson. While Millet defines the term as "the poetic and transcendent power of the mushroom cloud as an image and a phenomenon" (Jernigan), Ferguson, deriving her definition from aesthetic theory, sees the "nuclear sublime" as describing the unfathomable, fearsome nature of nuclear destruction; "[i]n that sense, the notion of the sublime is continuous with the notion of nuclear holocaust: to think the sublime would be to think the unthinkable and to exist in one's own nonexistence" (5-6).

precise moment in history when the problem of scale that we face today—epitomized in the concept of the Anthropocene—was made uniquely visible. For Millet, the image of the Test evokes a spatiotemporal immensity that is both horrifying and teeming with imaginative prospects. Through a nuanced exploration of the scale of the atomic bomb and the tension between beauty and horror in the nuclear sublime, the novel examines the possibilities and the limitations of looking at past, present, and future through the lens of deep time. Its conclusions are strikingly similar to DeLillo's: placing humanity in the context of the universe may be comforting, even if it requires facing extinction, but it fails to provide insight into immediate and interpersonal interactions.

The novel's structure and genre introduce its argument about the creative capabilities of the bomb, for it is the scale of the Trinity Test that seems to conjure the fantastical world of the novel. The end of the opening section prepares the reader for what is to follow in the carnivalesque tale: "[I]n the moment when a speck of dust acquires the power to engulf the world in fire, suddenly, then, all bets are off. Suddenly then there is no idea that cannot be entertained" (3). The logics of the bomb's technology, which channels the enormous power contained within the smallest unit of matter, allow readers to take the novel's unlikely premise seriously and imagine three scientists from the past "born again" into the present (13). Notably the novel makes no attempt to explain how the scientists move through time. Unlike the time travel in Laymon's *Long Division* and classic science fiction novels, there is no portal, no time machine, no space-time

continuum. As a result, readers must rely solely on the bomb's creative power to explain the story's more unbelievable elements.

Not only does the bomb stimulate imaginative thinking but it also initiates epistemological changes. Visualizing the Trinity Test disorients Ann because it requires a recalibration of scale. Her reflection on the aesthetic representation of the bomb—she surmises that it was implanted in her mind by "any number of World War Two documentaries" (5)—mirrors the watcher's experience seeing *24-Hour Psycho* in *Point Omega*. When Ann thinks about the bomb's mushroom cloud, her systems for making meaning are disrupted just as the anonymous observer is confused by the lethargic pace of Gordon's installation piece. Ann admits that she "wanted things to be separate, she wanted categories, she wanted some spaces reserved for particular things and other spaces prohibited to them" (124). But Millet's story suggests that Ann's perspective may be too limited since it ignores the exciting transformations that may take place when concepts fundamental to our thinking are radically redefined: "Evidently the mundane is by nature massive, even all-powerful. Once a few particles can exterminate people by the billions, never again can it be argued that small and trivial are in the same family" (34).

Oh Pure and Radiant Heart suggests that widening our historical imagination in order to take into account human, historical, and planetary time scales may reveal our cultural and individual blind spots and enable us to perceive less noticeable phenomena. (Again, one might hear echoes of DeLillo's refrain: Alter the format and see the flaws.) In particular, Millet takes pains to show that an awareness of deep time alters the way we

understand and record violence. Taking the long view, she demonstrates, might result in a greater attention to what Rob Nixon has called "slow violence"—"violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). With sustained attention to slow violence, *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* emphasizes both the short-term and the long-term effects of developing, testing, and deploying atomic bombs.

Scattered throughout the novel are passages that appear to report the immediate aftermath of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki objectively but also catalogue the lingering effects of radiation sickness and the ruin of native populations and environments at testing sites in the United States and on Pacific Ocean islands. One such passage explains the process by which these locations were identified: "They would look for places where they could explode their gadgets without obvious and immediate fatalities and quietly measure the gadgets' effectiveness. These tended to be places where only poor people lived, sparsely distributed and ill educated, unable or disinclined to speak up in their own defense. . . . Such places could be found both far away and close to home" (237). Millet's word choice highlights her attention to historical facts that often go acknowledged. The casualties of nuclear testing are not often *obvious* or *immediate*, and the kinds of populations that bear the largest burden are too dispersed—too *sparse*—to be noteworthy.

As it draws attention to what is often left out of Cold War histories, Millet's account also reveals that the site of Hiroshima has been sanitized. When the scientists

arrive, they are shocked by how "nondescript" the city is: ruins have been rebuilt, and industrial development is in full swing (188). Ann thinks, "After all that there is nothing much here" (189). She is disappointed that such incredible destruction has gone unmarked: "She had thought she would disembark from the plane into importance: a brooding and massive loss, a moment trapped forever in structures, architecture of grief, outrage, horror, a place that felt like a cry of shock, husky and shadowed aftermath, dark broadcast that *this was the place* . . . . But Hiroshima was businesslike and had buried its past in normalcy" (189). Where one would expect the effects of the bomb to be most visible, at Ground Zero, there is almost no trace; instead, the legacy of the attack on Hiroshima is found in the remote locations where atomic bombs continue to be deployed. The "husky and shadowed aftermath" is visible, if one looks hard enough, in the Marshall Islands, where a "paradise" of "turquoise shallows" was corrupted and "re-christened by the American military . . . [as] the 'Pacific Proving Grounds'" (243-4). Nixon argues that many forms of slow violence disproportionately affect the population of the global South and that "the physical liberty to forget the wars themselves is also unevenly distributed" (227). *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* brings such injustices to light.

The novel also acknowledges other kinds of violence inflicted by nuclear testing, from the psychological effects of encountering that scale of destruction to its incalculable toll on the environment. Millet notes that many survivors of the attacks in Japan were "shunned for their disfigurements and illnesses. Many became pariahs" (194). In addition, she mentions the experiences of American soldiers who witnessed the

destructive capabilities of the bomb and were instructed to cover up what they had seen (257). However, Millet's most graphic descriptions are reserved for the ecological devastation caused by the bomb. Detailing an underground nuclear test performed in Alaska in 1971, she writes, "Cannikin [the bomb] was detonated with such force that thousands of animals were killed and whole lakes on the island were drained. Seabirds standing on the beach when the ground rose beneath them had their legs driven upward into their bodies, and the eyes of sea otters and seals exploded out of their skulls" (288). When the scientists and Ann go to the White Sands Missile Range to revisit the Trinity Site, they encounter Trinitite, the unnatural radioactive glass that formed on the ground after the explosion. The stone is the embodiment of the scientists' fear that the bomb represents "the shudder of history petrified" (54). At Trinity history was *literally* turned into rock, and humanity's mistakes were cemented into the geologic record.

By emphasizing these long-term effects, Millet superimposes an awareness of the processes that normally operate at the scale of deep time onto her historical account of the Cold War.[42] Although Millet does not include this information in the text, it is worth noting that above-ground atomic tests in the 1960s distributed radioactive isotopes all over the world. Sedimentary records reveal a "radiogenic nuclide peak" in 1963; for this

---

[42] I am not suggesting that the span of time between Cold War-era atomic testing and 2003 qualifies as "deep time." The slow violence that Millet details moves across decades, not millennia. I am arguing, however, that this violence comes into focus much more clearly when seen through the lens of deep time. In that context it becomes evident that the destruction documented in *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* is so global and powerful, it affects processes that normally change at an undetectable rate.

reason, some have suggested that this sedimentary layer may serve as an important marker of the beginning of the Anthropocene (Gibbard and Walker 34).[43] In her examination of the legacy of the nuclear age, Millet draws our attention to the slow violence that underlies the history of American militarism that often remains unmentioned in official accounts. To provide an illustrative example: historians still debate the use of the atomic bomb in Japan. One side claims that the use of the bomb was necessary because it likely prevented even more casualties while those on the other side (often called "Hiroshima revisionists") argue that the attack was not justified because projected casualties were exaggerated in order to garner public support for the bomb.[44] What is often not taken into account by either side is the horrifying and ongoing experience of the *hibakusha*, those who survived the two bombs, often with life-altering physical and psychological injuries.[45] But Millet is not solely interested in rewriting history; she is also drawing attention to the future consequences of our present actions by consistently reminding readers that the nuclear age *continues*. She mentions George W. Bush's plan to develop "usable nukes" for use in targeted attacks (406) along with the

---

[43] However, most scholars argue that the "onset of environmental changes resulting from human activity" began at the very least a decade earlier (Gibbard and Walker 34).

[44] The most frequently cited Hiroshima revisionist is Gar Alperowitz, whose book *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth* contains the best statement of his argument. A good exemplar of the other side of the debate is Robert P. Newman's *Truman and the Hiroshima Cult*. For a recent contribution to the debate—and a firm statement against revisionism—see Maddox.

[45] Jonathan Watts reports that even in 2000, over fifty years after the bomb, people continued to petition the government to be recognized as *hibakusha*, hoping to receive state medical support (1009).

United States' withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2001 (416). Despite the supposed abeyance of the nuclear threat, Millet shows that weapons of mass destruction still affect individuals and the planet in unacknowledged ways.

These journalistic accounts are interwoven throughout with the novel's fantastical elements, which in their own way contribute to the examination of destruction across deep time. The story's primary conceit—the time-traveling scientists—highlights a major obstacle to perceiving slow violence: people often do not live long enough to face the long-term consequences of their actions. Just after he arrives in 2003, Oppenheimer visits the museum at Los Alamos. He replays the footage from the Trinity Test repeatedly, and he is struck by the gravity of what he sees—even though he has just come from witnessing it in person in 1945. He realizes that he needs the distance of time to understand its consequences: "When he was there, although it had been awesome, it had also been too near to see clearly. He had seen close instead of clear" (27). Clarity comes only with a change in perspective; he realizes that back in 1945 "[h]e had known nothing at all, finally, and now his own [past] ignorance stunned him" (27). But his temporal distance from the event does not imply emotional distance. When the three scientists travel to Hiroshima to tour the museum dedicated to the attacks, Oppenheimer is able to see for the first time the devastation of the bomb at a *human* level. He is "thrown by the shock of the effects of the bomb, laid out there in the museum in panoramic display, in black-and-white photographs and videos on wall monitors that showed the torments of the dying. He had been struck by all the names and faces of these victims, girls and boys,

the five-year-olds and the six-year-olds, the seven-year-olds, the eight-year-olds, the nine-year-olds and the ten" (206). What he sees through the "long lens of time," finally, is the *specificity* of the victims; he goes so far as to delineate the age of each child, in some small way honoring their individuality (153). Faced with "the weight of evidence" at the museum (193) and haunted by a "dread of themselves" (135), Fermi and Oppenheimer both suffer mental collapses, and all three scientists eventually commit to campaigning for nuclear nonproliferation.

If *24-Hour Psycho* breaks down the relationship of cause and effect to show how they are separated by elongated time, *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* uses the device of time travel to restore them so that the hidden links between them become visible. Whereas *Long Division*, as we saw in Chapter 2, uses time travel as a method for exploring and expanding the present, Millet's novel employs the genre as a way to reconnect past and future. Crucially, however, *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* reminds us that the scientists' experience—fast-forwarding from the moment they made the bomb possible to nearly sixty years later, when the consequences of their actions are just becoming clear—is irrational and impossible. The scientists' time-travel is a "spectacle"; they are "people they could not possibly be" (87). The book's voice of reason, Ann's husband Ben, reminds the three men that "no one's going to buy" their story, even with documentation or DNA evidence: "You can't prove what no one wants to believe," he tells Szilard (339). Despite Ben's assertions, however, the novel asks its *readers* to suspend their disbelief and surrender to their imagination; what is clearly impossible in the real world is possible

in a story. This is a thread that ties all of the texts in this dissertation together: to transform historical thinking requires that we dwell in and with impossibility and suspend disbelief in order to tap into what Chakrabarty calls "the diverse ways of being human" through which we might remake history (*Provincializing* 254).

Using the imagination to see the world through a different scale of time is a high stakes proposition with a potentially revolutionary payoff. Oppenheimer describes the unique insight gained by looking across decades of time, as the time-traveling scientists are able to do, when he addresses a group of their followers: "What shocked us most . . . was that it does not shock *you* . . . this long death of civilization unrolling before your eyes. . . . We can only speak . . . as people who entered into this desecrated landscape from another time and who may be able—I make no boast, but this is what we feel—who may be able, for that reason, to see the state of things with greater clarity than those who have lived within this prison all their lives" (221). Millet suggests that such a perspective can radically undermine the status quo. Almost from the moment they arrive in 2003, the scientists draw the attention of government agencies who send their representatives to follow the time-travelers. The perspective of these men, their ability to identify causal relationships across decades, and their insight into the "desecrated landscape" of the present all "pose some kind of threat to the US military, which has the largest weapons arsenal in the world" (303), and eventually Szilard is assassinated by representatives of these forces.

Oh Pure and Radiant Heart suggests that the radical lens of deep time requires that we reconceive humanity's future in addition to reimagining our past and present. The events that she details in her text make human extinction—an event that should only be conceivable on a planetary scale—a more immediate possibility. McGurl argues that any artistic work that takes deep time seriously must consider both ends of the time scale, "the 3.5 thousand million years in which life on earth has been evolving" *and* "the 4.5 thousand million years from now until the earth is incinerated in the heat-death of the sun" (538). As a result, these works always include "the shadow of death" (538). *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* fits this pattern, but it does not treat the "shadow of death" as solely horrifying; it also suggests that the inevitable fact of human extinction may provide a small measure of comfort and perhaps even point us toward a more ethical way of being in the world.

The novel is shot through with apocalyptic language and imagery that brings together its dual concerns of both nuclear and ecological destruction.[46] Szilard, for instance, connects the two when he states that the three scientists have been transported to 2003 because "it's coming to a head. History does have an end: ask the dinosaurs and

---

[46] Another connection between the two is found in the Doomsday Clock, which is maintained by the board of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, coincidentally founded in 1945 by former members of the Manhattan Project. The closer the clock is to midnight, the closer the board's preeminent scientists believe the world is to global catastrophe. From its inception the Clock has measured the likelihood of nuclear war; in 2007, the board began to take into consideration the threat posed by climate change. Since 2012, the Clock has been set at 5 minutes to midnight because of nuclear proliferation and "the hardships that large-scale disruption of the climate portends" (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists).

the Carolina parakeet and the giant sloths. The drums of the very last wars are beating" (123). The Christian followers of the activists believe that the three men "will bring the kingdom of God to earth" (355). For his part Oppenheimer assumes that by developing the means for humans to destroy themselves and the natural world, he and his colleagues initiated "the beginning of the end" (124). He realizes that the only response to this fatalistic view of history is to take stock of the tragedies that will precede that ultimate conclusion. Thus, conventional historical accounts primarily feature lists of "timelines, decisions, destroyed buildings, the dead. They were litanies, chants with the solemnity of judgment" (174). He explains further why these kinds of accounts are especially appropriate to the "end of history": "But it also seems to be the case, he thought, that what goes on and on has to be going *somewhere*, finally. And litanies were well-suited to the expression of outrageous grievance" (174). With final destruction in sight, Oppenheimer thinks, all we can do is wring our hands and make lists. The seemingly objective historical accounts that appear throughout the novel are examples of these "litanies": they present straightforward facts that explain "timelines, decisions, destroyed buildings, the dead." But in the novel's final section, Millet's litanies disappear, and she presents an alternative orientation to the past: aware of impending extinction—whether by nuclear war or environmental damage—we might project our eyes upward, turn away from the catastrophes of history and turn toward the cosmos.

After the scientists disappear as mysteriously and suddenly as they arrived, Ann and Ben remain deeply saddened by the destruction at Hiroshima, the environmental

disasters caused by nuclear testing, and the public's contempt for the time-travelers and their message of peace and nonproliferation. They leave the city of Santa Fe and move to a more remote area where Ann begins to work at a nearby observatory, the Very Large Array. There she catalogues images from radio telescopes. She took the job because she wanted to "feel the presence of the sextillion" stars "in the known universe" (448). The images that she catalogues are not photographic; they are "false-color images" that imagine what celestial bodies might look like using radio waves (450). This work is a far cry from her previous position as a librarian who helped people locate the answers to questions such as "how many children with blond hair had been born in 1983" (35). Her attention has shifted from empirically exploring the recent past to contemplating the cosmos, so vast that the only images available are highly imaginative and completely speculative.

Through Ann, Millet explores the ways that a sense of spatiotemporal enormity might imbue our everyday experience. Wrestling with the knowledge of humanity's extinction, the young woman is often "stricken . . . shot through with panic, convinced for a fleeting fraction of a second that what she was seeing would be the last sight seen" (451). She finds it hard to interact with others: "It even hurt her at times to be in the city, to see the weak and living animals whose time was marked, so precious and unsung, their children, their art, their gardens" (452). At the same time, however, Ann is comforted by what Greg Garrard has called "disanthropy," the vision of "a world completely and finally *without people*" (40, emphasis original). She takes consolation in the fact that "it

was not ego or a conviction of your own importance that made life worth living but whether you could see how perfect the world had always been without you" (324). The novel suggests that failing to envision this perfect world could have destructive consequences especially in light of the fact that it was that kind of arrogance that led the three scientists to develop the bomb. Oppenheimer comes to this realization just before he ascends with the flock of cranes: "At first, he thought, we tried to learn about the universe, and for a while we were still safe. But then we tried to learn about ourselves before the universe, not because we were curious but because we had something to prove. We wished to prove we were made in the image of God. And then the universe and ourselves became one in our eyes" (420). The scientists caused such devastation, he suggests, because they forgot the vastness of the universe and the relative insignificance of humanity.

Ann's work at the Very Large Array and her heightened awareness of deep time ensure that she will never mistake humanity for the entire universe as the scientists did. In fact, Ann imagines that the cosmos holds the key for mankind's *redemption*. She makes a clear distinction between the historical world that is finite and the infinite universe that provides hope:

> The ground is where history has happened, she thought, and when the future is mentioned many eyes are cast upward. Far above in space there are numerous phantom worlds, millions of light-years away. Their high meadows lie untouched, the white peaks of their green mountains blinding in the sun. Blowing grasses

> weave the shapes of wind across the wide plains and rivers run clear as glass. The planets there are home again, she thought: the land before we came. *What we have done wrong can be forgiven, for there is the earth reborn, again and again forever* (136-7, emphasis added).

To be *grounded*, tied to the earth, is to be turned toward the past rather than focused on what is to come. Gazing on the future, even one in which human extinction is guaranteed, offers a kind of solace: "[E]ven long after we are gone some particle in the universe will hold a memory of the words we once used to describe . . . beauty" (450). More than any of the other texts I consider in this dissertation, *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*—in addition to *Point Omega*—preserves a sense of the future as a separate entity toward which humanity advances across time. Its suggestion that we turn to the future with a hopeful gaze might seem to replicate the promises of rigidly progressivist narratives. But, seen through the dissident temporality of deep time, the distant future is transformed into a realm where human "progress" culminates not in social justice but in extinction—and, perhaps, a single molecule that retains the essence of human endeavor. The novel radicalizes its forward-looking hope by calibrating it to planetary rather than human scales.

While this vision offers an appealing alternative to the anxiety and fear that often accompany thoughts of human extinction, Millet acknowledges the problems inherent in a cosmic view that looks at time on such a large scale: it makes political and ethical responsibilities in the present seem so insignificant that individuals might disengage from

society. Although the novel's vision of deep time decenters humans, it warns against eschewing them altogether. When Ann and Ben realize that "history [is] over," they stop planning for the future because they feel that "what was beyond their presence was shimmering and unreal" so that they "could not go forward" (451). Paralyzed, Ann chooses not to have children even though her husband desperately wants them. She tells him, "It is not wrong for people to want something . . . but our problem is we want everything" (452). The only way Ann can move forward is to place more importance on the *planet's* future than on her own desires, even if doing so means remaining childless.[47]

Millet clearly finds Ann's disengagement dangerous. When she thinks beyond humanity, she cannot focus on the plight of individuals. Oppenheimer describes the trouble with taking a long view: "Distant bodies are excluded from the world of the mind . . . because they are both abstractions and matter, a sheerly living whole and an insensate mass but also a pure idea of flesh, hopeless in their plurality. Each man or woman alone we can love, but a carpet of them teems like ants. . . . And so a crowd does not receive our love, but only individuals, alone" (178-9). Millet's novel argues that only a palpable connection to individuals inculcates feelings of sympathy and pity, emotions that are crucial to creating a strong social fabric, and it suggests that suffering "ties us to other people where happiness does not" (204). A turn toward the cosmos and the scale of deep

---

[47] Those who participate in the Voluntary Human Extinction movement (established 1991) share Ann's attitude. They believe that "when every human chooses to stop breeding, Earth's biosphere will be allowed to return to its former glory."

time does not encourage this type of connection. Like *Point Omega*, *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* contends that tapping into a planetary time scale offers a vital alternative perspective, but both novels show that this perspective has significant limitations since it promises no understanding of our interpersonal relationships or the daily tragedies all of us must face.

The Aesthetics of Fiction in the Anthropocene

Both DeLillo's and Millet's novels open with characters contemplating an image. The plot of *Point Omega* is set in motion by *24-Hour Psycho* and *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* begins with Ann's vision of the mushroom cloud. Both texts are interested in how aesthetic forms produce temporal consciousness although DeLillo considers the question more explicitly. Visual images seem the obvious choice to stimulate an awareness of scale, but these novels filter those images through an individual's viewpoint, transforming them from violent scenes of destruction to productive representations of vastness. *Point Omega* recycles the horror of *Psycho* in order to show how a sense of elongated time might change the film so fundamentally that its sense of dread subsides. Ann, too, repurposes a disturbing vision: in a dream about the Trinity Test that she has at the beginning of *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*, she witnesses a freakish flash of light "as bright as a thousand suns" followed by a savage fireball (4). While she recognizes the destructive power of the nuclear device, she reacts to the explosion with tranquility, translating its ugliness into beauty and transforming its destruction into creativity when

she suggests that the bomb is "not a mushroom, but a tree. A great and ancient tree, growing and sheltering us all" (4).

These altered images enable those who view them to re-scale their imaginations and become attuned to the slowness and vastness of deep time. This heightened awareness is especially critical in the Anthropocene, when artists and activists alike search for ways to help individuals conceptualize humanity's impact on the environment over time. So far most scholars have, like DeLillo and Millet, focused on *images*—artwork, models, visualizations—that might communicate the scale of that impact across multiple registers.[48] But these two novels also perform experiments with their own form and genre, provocatively suggesting methods by which fiction might enable temporal reorientation. Specifically I want to draw attention to how *Point Omega* and *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* use structure and point of view to "scale up" our historical imagination so that we might confront two central truths of the Anthropocene: that we have an impact *as a species* rather than as individuals, groups, or nations and that we are faced with our own extinction.

This is new territory for the novel. Decades ago, Ian Watt argued that the genre is defined by its attention to individual characters and its operation at a "minutely discriminated time scale" that allows it to fully express "the texture of daily experience"

---

[48] The beautifully curated collection *Making the Geologic Now* lists those who "are adding new layers of cultural meaning and aesthetic sensation to the geologic": "contemporary artists, popular culture producers, speculative architects, scientists and philosophers" but notably omits any mention of authors or novelists (Ellsworth and Kruse 6).

(17-8, 22). Garrard reiterated Watt's argument in a slightly different form in 2012, when he wrote that fictional works cannot represent a world without humans because of their "helpless allegiance . . . to narrative voice and anthropomorphic characterization" (43). McGurl would likely agree: he shows that the very basis of the novel form—indeed, of all narrative—is human subjectivity (548). That subjectivity almost always requires individual characters to serve as "vehicles" for "narrative understanding" (546). For him, those works of genre fiction that seek to explore scale are sure to fail because they attempt to contract the vastness of the universe down to the level of the individual, "insist[ing] on the . . . *personification* of the absolutely other" (550, emphasis added). *Point Omega* and *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* represent significant (though not completely successful) aesthetic experiments, I argue, because they reverse this process, attempting through paratactic structures, polyvocality, and the representation of interiority to scale up the human and depict the "species thinking" that Chakrabarty finds critical in the Anthropocene ("Climate" 213). I do not suggest that these formal tactics are original—they have obviously been employed by many authors before—but I contend that in these texts they are put to distinctive uses that make them especially significant in the age of the Anthropocene.

On the surface these novels could hardly be more different. DeLillo's novella, while brief in length, is slow and stretched, the plot basically static until the last quarter of the book. Even then, the "action" triggered by Jessie's disappearance is depicted as an *absence*, circumscribed as a negative space within the plot. Finley thinks to himself, "I

could think around the fact of her disappearance. But at the heart, in the moment itself, the physical crux of it, only a hole in the air" (83). By contrast, Millet's long novel is sprawling, culminating in an epic road trip across America with dozens of characters and settings. However, they share structural similarities. Both contain disjointed sections evocatively placed side by side. DeLillo has described *Point Omega* as a triptych (Browde), with the central story of Elster, Finley, and Jessie flanked by the sections set at MoMA. A triptych does not suggest a typical progression through narrative but describes three pieces intended to resonate with meaning when set against each other.

The first and third sections set at MoMA are told from a limited third-person perspective. They record the thoughts of the sinister anonymous watcher, while the middle section is narrated by Finley in the first-person. Stylistically, however, the three sections are all quite similar; the narrative voices of the watcher and Finley are hardly distinguishable. Although the novel focuses on the interior monologue of these two men, readers are often kept at a distance, especially in the desert scenes between Elster and Finley, when both men speak in abstruse language and non sequiturs. Michiko Kakutani complains that the characters are often "more holograms than human beings" (C1). But I argue that what seems like an aesthetic failure to Kakutani is actually DeLillo's attempt to represent a species consciousness: the overall effect of the book's narrative structure is that the voices of three men—the watcher, Elster, and Finley—are placed side-by-side but seem to speak with one relatively disembodied voice, which mirrors the way that *homo sapiens* exert force as a single unit in the Anthropocene.

Millet, too, uses parataxis, placing tangentially related passages without clearly articulating the relationships between them or providing transitions from one to the other. *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*, narrated entirely in third person, is comprised of disparate narrative styles and voices that alternate among (1) brief scenes that detail the adventures of Ann, Ben, and the time-traveling scientists; (2) historical accounts of the scientists' "real" lives; (3) reports on the history, development, and continuing use of the atomic bomb; and (4) philosophical reveries. The last three kinds of narration are not focalized through any character's consciousness but seem to come from a disembodied source. For example, these lines free-float on the page: "What do we seek to feel? Happy, they say, frequently" (135). In another passage, a similarly distant voice says, "Reason, like bombs, can be deployed from far away. Closer up there is nothing but feeling" (192). These interludes, which loom over the text conveying an omniscient voice, are interspersed with intense explorations of the consciousness of various characters. During their visit to Hiroshima, for example, readers are taken deep into Oppenheimer's thoughts: "Walking dumbly, thinking of the dead children in the museum of the atom bomb, Oppenheimer knew suddenly that suffering was what gave onto love. Suffering itself is beloved: love and suffering are far closer to each other than love and pleasure" (209). Pages later, following sections that variously narrate developments within the scientists' group of followers and report on the devastating effects of the atomic bomb, we are plunged without warning back into Oppenheimer's mind, where his thoughts seem uninterrupted from the previous interior monologue, as if that particular thread of

narration has remained deep inside his consciousness: "[A] being that does not suffer also does not receive our love" (232). The polyvocal composition of *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* paradoxically creates the same effect as the single disembodied voice of *Point Omega*: both novels detach from interiority and move away from the novel's classic orientation toward the individual—*Point Omega* by suggestively associating three individual consciousnesses and *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* by emphasizing the ruptures among individual and collective voices.

Both texts zoom in on and out from the thoughts of individual characters to a vision of the universe since the beginning of time. While these two novels can hold distinctive distances and time scales in tension, they cannot fully integrate them. As much as *Point Omega* and *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* seek to bring together human and planetary time scales thematically, in formal terms they preserve the rift between these domains. Their paratactic style and roving narrative voice, I argue, are symptomatic of our growing cultural awareness of the Anthropocene, which, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, demands that we "view the human simultaneously on contradictory registers: as a geophysical force and as a political agent [,] . . . belonging at once to differently-scaled histories of the planet, of life and species, and of human societies" ("Postcolonial" 14). These two novels suggest that because we exist at the collision of human and planetary time scales, we have no choice but to toggle back and forth among irreconcilable epistemological and ontological perspectives.

As both novels progress, the perspective most familiar to readers grows less visible as the inner lives of certain characters—namely those characters most conscious of the scale of deep time—become increasingly less accessible. In *Point Omega* Elster, dazed by the loss of his daughter, morphs from being an articulate conveyor of his interior monologue into a silent shadow of his former self. Finley describes an interaction with the older man: "He seemed to listen belatedly, knowing I'd spoken but failing to gather a meaning. He was beginning to resemble an x-ray, all eye sockets and teeth" (96). Elster transforms into a skeletal image of himself; we might say that he converts into a fossil and is on his way to becoming extinct. Similarly, in *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* Oppenheimer "bec[omes] an abstraction" (420). Ben notices that the scientist is "always in the process of vanishing. He was present only in faded effigy" (402). And then he actually does vanish, ascending with a flock of cranes—itself a species on the brink of extinction—that "enfold him" in their "density of lightness" (434). By gradually restricting narrative access to these characters who ultimately transmogrify into the nonhuman, both novels gesture toward the inevitability of human extinction, dramatizing the gradual disappearance of humanity.

In doing so DeLillo and Millet use fiction as a technology to extend language beyond the bounds of human experience. They stretch the formal aspects of the novel to explore ontological one-ness with the universe as opposed to human subjectivity, which has served for centuries as the very basis of the genre. Taken together, these texts—especially when placed alongside the other four novels I examine in this dissertation—

make a strong case that the novel itself is a worthy medium through which to revise our temporal perspective.

Conclusion

Looking Forward

This study puts into conversation voices from queer, African American, and environmentally-engaged perspectives that are concerned with the legacy of the past and the misleading but widely accepted concept of social progress in the future. I suggest that the authors examined here use temporal representations to redefine and reimagine survival and success within the marginalized communities they depict. This dissertation emphasizes their unusual and often unacknowledged strategies for deploying historical narratives and futural thinking in political, academic, and cultural settings. In this final brief section of my project, I want to indicate how my claims here might be developed and extended in the ongoing debate about the meaning of history and futurity.

I draw several connections among the texts I gather here in order to highlight how certain ideas or concepts might be employed in different but often complementary ways by individual authors. For instance, in Chapter 2 I assert that the teenagers in Laymon's *Long Division* use fictional texts to create an invented archive that mirrors Bình's invented past in Truong's *The Book of Salt*. The similarity between the two books from different genres bolsters the radical notion of using imagined archival material as "real" documentation. However, Laymon gives his fictional archives a slightly different political valence: instead of creating a history that makes 2013 City and 1985 City feel as though they belong, as Bình sets out to do, the characters invent a community that

extends across time to teach them important lessons and help them imaginatively solve the problems they face.

But there are many other connections that resonate among the different temporal-historical models all of the texts in my study present, and these might be usefully identified and expanded in other scholarly projects. One thread running throughout the chapters of this dissertation is a resistance to futurity most provocatively articulated by Lee Edelman, who argues that real political dissonance is only possible when someone refuses to believe that the future promises improvement and fulfillment. He encourages queer subjects in particular to embrace this position since they are already associated with backwardness and sexual unproductivity. One question my work raises is how this approach to the future—which Edelman identifies as uniquely *queer*—relates to the scale of deep time that implies human extinction. How does Bình's disavowal of straight time and his commitment to living outside of heteronormative expectations parallel Ann's contemplation of the end of humanity, her decision not to have children, and her choice to separate herself from society? Are the two characters' attitudes towards the future different in degree or kind from each other? What might be gained from looking at Ann's decisions through the lens of queerness and viewing Bình's convictions through the perspective of deep time and environmental consciousness? What may come into focus is that queerness offers a unique opportunity to contemplate eco-consciousness and inspire environmental awareness. It is only through her rejection of a future for herself—a

rejection historically and socially associated with queer subjects—that Ann comes to contextualize humanity within the universe.

Another productive line of questioning may arise from my decision in this dissertation to use novels to investigate temporal concerns. Other scholars have looked to various media including theater performance, visual art, and data models for groundbreaking work about the nature of time; by contrast, my project invites a closer look at the genre of the novel. I intend my dissertation to serve as a rejoinder to scholars like Mark McGurl and Greg Garrard who suggest that the form of the novel is aesthetically limited and fails to push the boundaries of time, scale, and self. I do not mean to hold up these six novels as indisputable literary successes, but I suggest that their attempts to reimagine temporality and to imbue it with political dimensions are significant and deserving of critical attention. Because the novel has traditionally been associated with individual consciousness and relatively small-scale events, it poses a particular challenge to authors who wish to investigate the interplay among personal, historical, and planetary time. Even so, writers from diverse backgrounds who have different agendas continue to employ the genre to express their political and cultural concerns. Thus, the exploration of novelistic form and structure I have begun here, particularly in my third chapter, might be extended to demonstrate how the novel continues to evolve as a genre.

Most of the novels I consider in this dissertation work particularly well for this kind of exploration because their authors explicitly ponder what creative forms might

stimulate temporal consciousness. For example, *The Book of Salt*, *The Swimming-Pool Library*, *The Intuitionist*, and *Long Division* all wonder about the role of imaginative fiction and genre in developing different temporal perspectives. *Point Omega* provides an extended, novelistic rumination on *24-Hour Psycho*, a piece of installation art that itself provides commentary on Hitchcock's masterpiece. DeLillo only draws vague connections between the three artistic forms—novel, visual art, and film—but critics might push these connections further: What relationship does *Psycho* have to *Point Omega*, especially considering both involve a stylized type of violence in which a woman is stabbed with a knife? And what is the significance of the fact that the relationship of those two is mediated by *24-Hour Psycho*? What can the novel do that a film or a work of installation art cannot? What does the novel tell us about deep time that the other media do not? How do the constraints of novelistic time, which DeLillo works to exceed in *Point Omega*, differ from the constraints of cinematic time, which *Psycho* so famously defied in its unconventional plotting and structure? Answering these questions will help to address the larger concerns about the novel's uniqueness and its viability and relevance as a form for the 21st century.

As much as I have attempted to show how these texts might work together, I also intend my dissertation to expose the distinctions among them. These distinctions may become clearer if the framework I have developed here were shifted slightly, away from the concept of progress and toward the idea of the affective need for history. I mentioned this need in Chapter 1 in the context of queer theory, which has identified the desire for

queer men and women to feel as though others like them have existed throughout time. But the desire for history and for futurity varies widely among these texts, and the stakes of those desires are not always clear. The political motivations that underlie the historical impulse of *Long Division*—the novel emphasizes the importance of seeing the past in the current moment and engaging in the present rather than placing all hope in the future—contrast starkly with the disengagement from the world that Millet considers in *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*. The distant future that Ann faces dwarfs the immediate concerns of Laymon's teenagers. Still, *both* novels are clearly politically engaged, but their definition of what counts as political differs. Because of their different investments, the texts serve distinct functions: Laymon's seems to encourage community building; Millet's simply asks us to consider the possible benefits of shifting our epistemological perspective away from the scale of the human. What these texts desire from history looks quite different in practice. An extended analysis of the friction between and among these texts and the political implications and utility of their temporal-historical models may further enrich our account of historical representation in contemporary fiction.

But I mean for this work to do more than explore the possibilities of fiction. A driving force in this dissertation is to find strategies—strategies that might have real world applications—for developing a hopeful political disposition, even as the work poses questions about whether hope requires that we conform to the compulsory forward momentum that propels the liberal discourse of progress. The readings I provide here nuance the notion of hope, finding it even in the bleak ending of *Oh Pure and Radiant*

Heart: after all, a kind of hopefulness resides in the thought of a world restored to its natural state after humans stop wreaking havoc upon it. This approach serves as an extreme form of Cornel West's concept of "blues hope," which I discussed in Chapter 2 as a method for encouraging optimism without forgetting the difficulty and tragedy of everyday life. I intend the work I have begun here to point the way toward this kind of unorthodox hopefulness in other works and in future scholarship.

WORKS CITED

Ackerman, Diane. *The Human Age: The World Shaped by Us*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2014. Print.

Alderson, David. "Desire as Nostalgia: The Novels of Alan Hollinghurst." *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries*. Ed. David Alderson and Linda Anderson. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000. 29-48. Print.

Alperowitz, Gar. *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth.* New York: Random House, 1995. Print.

Atkinson, Kate. *Life After Life.* New York: Little Brown and Company, 2013. Print.

Atwood, Margaret. *MaddAddam.* New York: Anchor Books, 2013. Print.

---. *Oryx and Crake.* New York: Anchor Books, 2003. Print.

---. *The Year of the Flood.* New York: Anchor Books, 2009. Print.

Barabak, Mark Z. "Obama Easily Wins Heated S.C. Primary." *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles Times, 27 Jan. 2008. Web. 23 Jan. 2015.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982. Print.

---. "Historical Discourse." *Introduction to Structuralism*. Ed. Michael Lane. New York: Basic Books, 1970. 145-155. Print.

Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. 253-264. Print.

Berlant, Lauren. "Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event." *American Literary History* 20.4 (2008): 845-60. Print.

Bérubé, Michael. "Race and Modernity in Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*." *The Holodeck in the Garden: Science and Technology in Contemporary American Fiction*. Ed. Peter Freese and Charles B. Harris. Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive P, 2004. Print.

Best, Stephen. "On Failing to Make the Past Present." *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (2012): 454-74. Print.

Bloch, Ernst. “Can Hope Be Disappointed?” *Literary Essays*. Trans. Andrew Joron and Others. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998. 339-45. Print.

---. *The Principle of Hope*. Trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986. Print.

Boccardi, Mariadele. *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.

Boyer, Paul. *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. New York: Pantheon, 1985. Print.

Braudel, Fernand. *On History*. Trans. Sarah Matthews. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1980. Print.

Bristow, Joseph. *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885*. Buckingham: Open UP, 1995. Print.

Browde, Daniel. “Softly Goes the Don.” *Sunday Times* [South Africa] 23 May 2010: n.pag. *Lexis Nexis Academic*. Web. 4 Nov. 2014.

Brown, Cynthia Stokes. *Big History: From the Big Bang to the Present*. New York and London: The New Press, 2007. Print.

Brown, James N. and Patricia M. Sant. “Race, Class, and the Homoerotics of *The Swimming-Pool Library*.” *Postcolonial and Queer Theories: Intersections and Essays*. Ed. John C. Hawley. London: Greenwood, 2001. 113-128. Print.

Boxall, Peter. *Twenty-First Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013. Print.

Buffon, Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de. *Histoire Naturelle, Générale et particulière*. Paris: De l’Imprimerie royale, 1752-1779. Print.

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. “Timeline.” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2014. Web. 21 Nov. 2014.

Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains.* New York: W.W. Norton, 2010. Print.

Cassidy, Suzanne. “The Party’s Over.” *New York Times*. New York Times, 9 Oct. 1988.

Web. 1 July 2014.

Castiglia, Christopher, and Christopher Reed. *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 2012. Print.

Chabon, Michael. *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008. Print.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (2009): 197-222. Print.

---. "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change." *New Literary History* 43.1 (2012): 1-18. Print.

---. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2000. Print.

Cheney, Matthew. "Interview: Lydia Millet." *Strange Horizons*. Strange Horizons, 16 Jan. 2006. Web. 10 Oct. 2014.

Christian, David. *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 2004. Print

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "There Is No Post-Racial America." *The Atlantic*. The Atlantic Monthly Group, July/August 2015. Web. 5 July 2015.

Coffman, Chris. "The Migrating Look: Visual Economies of Queer Desire in *The Book of Salt*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 56.2 (2014): 148-180. Print.

Cohen, Samuel. *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2009. Print.

Cohn, Dorrit. *The Distinction of Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999. Print.

---. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978. Print.

Cook, Matt. "Queer Conflicts: Love, Sex and War, 1914-1967." *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages*. Ed. Cook. Oxford and Westport, CN: Greenwood World, 2007. 145-177. Print.

Cooper, Brenda. "Snapshots of Postcolonial Masculinities: Alan Hollinghurst's *The*

Swimming-Pool Library and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 34.1 (1999): 135-157. Print.

Corber, Robert J. "Sentimentalizing Gay History: Mark Merlis, Alan Hollinghurst, and the Cold War Persecution of Homosexuals." *Arizona Quarterly* 55.4 (1999): 115-141. Print.

Cowart, David. "The Lady Vanishes: Don DeLillo's *Point Omega*." *Contemporary Literature* 53.1 (2012): 31-50. Print.

Cruz, Denise. "'Love Is Not a Bowl of Quinces': Food, Desire, and the Queer Asian Body in Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*." *Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader*. Ed. Robert Ji-Song Ku, Martin F. Manalansan, and Anita Mannur. New York: NYU P, 2013. 354-370. Print.

Currie, Mark. *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. Print.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003. Print.

---. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2012. Print.

---. "The Queer Art of the Counterarchive," *Cruising the Archive: Queer Art and Culture in Los Angeles, 1945-1980*. Ed. David Franz and Mia Locks. Los Angeles: ONE National Lesbian and Gay Archives, 2011. 32-35. Print.

D'Souza, Dinesh. *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society*. New York: The Free P, 1995. Print.

David, Hugh. *On Queer Street: A Social History of British Homosexuality 1895-1995*. London: HarperCollins, 1997. Print.

de Groot, Jerome. *The Historical Novel*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.

de Jongh, Nicholas. "The Deep End—Alan Hollinghurst's First Novel is an Elegy and a Lament for Gay Culture." *The Guardian* 27 Feb. 1988: n. pag. *LexisNexis Academic*. Web. 15 May 2014.

Dekker, George. *The American Historical Romance.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987. Print.

DeLillo, Don. *Point Omega*. New York and London: Scribner, 2010. Print.

Dellamora, Richard. *Apocalyptic Overtures: Sexual Politics and the Sense of an Ending*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression.* Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1996. Print.

Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs and Steel*. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1997. Print.

Dimock, Wai Chee. "Low Epic." *Critical Inquiry* 39 (2013): 614-631. Print.

---. *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. Print.

Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1999. Print.

Doctorow, E. L. *Ragtime.* 1975. New York: Penguin Books, 1996. Print.

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk. Writings*. Ed. Nathan Huggins. New York: Library of America, 1986. Print.

Dukes, Thomas. "'Mappings of Secrecy and Disclosure': *The Swimming-Pool Library*, the Closet, and the Empire." *Journal of Homosexuality* 31.3 (1996): 95-107. Print.

Dunn, Allen and Thomas F. Haddox, eds. *The Limits of Literary Historicism*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2011. Print.

Dunye, Cheryl, dir. *The Watermelon Woman*. 1996. First Run Features, 2000. DVD.

Dykema, Amanda. "Embodied Knowledges: Synesthesia and the Archive in Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*." *MELUS* 39.1 (2014): 106-129. Print.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham NC: Duke UP, 2004. Print.

Edenheim, Sara. "Lost and Never Found: The Queer Archive of Feelings and Its Historical Propriety." *differences* 24.3 (2014): 36-62. Print.

Edwards, Paul N. "Entangled Histories: Climate Science and Nuclear Weapons

Research." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 68.4 (2012): 28-40. Print.

Elias, Amy J. *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001. Print.

Ellsworth, Elizabeth, and Jamie Kruse, eds. *Making the Geologic Now: Responses to Material Conditions of Contemporary Life*. Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2013. Print.

Eng, David L. *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2010. Print.

Ferguson, Frances. "The Nuclear Sublime." *Diacritics* 14.2 (1984): 4-10. Print.

Fleishman, Avrom. *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1971. Print.

Fleissner, Jennifer. "Historicism Blues." *American Literary History* 25.4 (2013): 699-717. Print.

Freeman, Elizabeth. "Synchronic/Anachronic." *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present*. Ed. Joel Burges and Amy J. Elias. New York: New York UP, 2016. Forthcoming. Print.

---. "Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography." *Social Text* 23.3-4 (2005): 57-68. Print.

Fung, Catherine. "A History of Absences: The Problem of Reference in Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt." Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 45.1 (2012): 94-110. Print.

Garrard, Greg. "Worlds Without Us: Some Types of Disanthropy." *SubStance* 41.1 (2012): 40-60. Print.

Gauthier, Marni. *Amnesia and Redress in Contemporary American Fiction.* London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011. Print.

Gibbard, P.L. and M.J.C. Walker. "The Term 'Anthropocene' in the Context of Formal Geological Classification." *A Stratigraphical Basis for the Anthropocene*. Ed. Waters et al. London: Geological Society, 2014. Special Publications 395. 29-37. Print.

Gordon, Avery F. "Something More Powerful than Skepticism." *Keeping Good Time:*

Reflections on Knowledge Power and People. Boulder and London: Paradigm, 2004. 187-205. Print.

Gossman, Lionel. *Between History and Literature*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1990. Print.

Gould, Stephen Jay. *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1987. Print.

Gregory, Melissa. "Rapides Sheriff's Office, Pineville Probing KKK Fliers." *The Town Talk*. The Town Talk, 9 Feb. 2015. Web. 1 Mar. 2015.

Halberstam, Judith. "The Anti-Social Thesis in Queer Theory." *PMLA* 121 (May 2006): 824. Print.

---. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York and London: New York UP, 2005. Print.

Hawking, Stephen. *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*. Toronto and New York: Bantam Books, 1988. Print.

Hemon, Aleksandar. *The Lazarus Project.* New York: Penguin Books, 2008. Print.

Higgins, Patrick. *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Postwar Britain*. London: Fourth Estate, 1996. Print.

Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today* 29.1 (2008): 103-128. Print.

Hollinghurst, Alan. *The Line of Beauty*. 2004. New York: Bloomsbury, 2005. Print.

---. *The Stranger's Child*. New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011. Print.

---. *The Swimming-Pool Library*. New York: Vintage, 1988. Print.

Houlbrook, Matt. *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2005. Print.

Humboldt, Alexander von. *Kosmos*. Stuttgart: n.pub., 1845-62. Print.

Hunt, Lynn. *Measuring Time, Making History.* Budapest and New York: Central European UP, 2008. Print.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988. Print.

Hyam, Ronald. "Empire and Sexual Opportunity." *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 14.2 (1986): 34-89. Print.

Insko, Jeffrey. "The Prehistory of Posthistoricism." *The Limits of Literary Historicism*. Ed. Allen Dunn and Thomas F. Haddox. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2011. 105-123. Print.

Jackson, Shelley. *Half Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006. Print.

Jagose, Annamarie. "Feminism's Queer Theory." *Feminism and Psychology* 19.2 (2009): 159-74. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Antinomies of Realism*. London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2013. Print.

---. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London and New York: Verso, 2005. Print.

---. *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. Print.

Jernigan, Jessica Lee. "The Nuclear Sublime: Interview with Lydia Millet." *Jessica Lee Jernigan: Cultural Criticism and Beauty Tips*. N.p., 4 Jan. 2006. Web. 1 Oct. 2014.

Johnson, David K. *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2004. Print.

Jones, Norman W. "Eucharistically Queer?: The Postsecular as Transnational Reading Strategy in *The Book of Salt*." *Studies in American Fiction* 41.1 (2014): 103-129. Print.

Kakutani, Michiko. "Make War. Make Talk. Make It All Unreal." Rev. of *Point Omega*, by Don DeLillo. *New York Times* 2 Feb. 2010: C1. Print.

Kurlansky, Mark. *Salt: A World History.* New York: Walker and Company, 2002. Print.

Lane, Christopher. *The Ruling Passion: British Colonial Allegory and the Paradox of Homosexual Desire*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995. Print.

Laymon, Kiese. *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America*. Chicago, Bolden, 2013. Print.

---. *Long Division*. Chicago: Bolden, 2013. Print.

LeGuin, Ursula K. *Always Coming Home.* 1985. Berkeley: University of California P, 2001. Print.

Lewis, Simon. *British and African Literature in Transnational Context*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2011. Print.

Linzie, Anna. *The True Story of Alice B. Toklas: A Study of Three Autobiographies*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2006. Print.

Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007. Print.

Lukács, Georg. *The Historical Novel.* London: Merlin P, 1962. Print.

Maddox, Robert James, ed. *Hiroshima in History: The Myths of Revisionism*. Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 2007. Print.

Mantel, Hilary. *Wolf Hall.* New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009. Print.

McGurl, Mark. "The Posthuman Comedy." *Critical Inquiry* 38 (2012): 533-553. Print.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York: Metheun, 1987. Print.

McLuhan, Marshall. "The Gutenberg Galaxy." *Essential McLuhan*. Ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone. Ontario, House of Anansi P, 1995. 90-145. Print.

Michaels, Walter Benn. *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004. Print.

Millet, Lydia. *Ghost Lights.* New York: W.W. Norton, 2011. Print.

---. *How the Dead Dream.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: Counterpoint, 2008. Print.

---. *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*. 2005. London: Vintage Books, 2007. Print.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New

York and London: New York UP, 2009. Print.

---. "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8.2 (1996): 5-16. Print.

Nealon, Christopher. *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall.* Durham and London: Duke UP, 2001. Print.

Nelson, Alondra. "Introduction: Future Texts." *Afrofuturism*. Spec. issue of *Social Text* 20.2 (2002): 1-15. Print.

Newman, Robert W. *Truman and the Hiroshima Cult.* East Lansing, MI: Michigan State UP, 1995. Print.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 2011. Print.

Nünning, Ansgar. "Historical Writing and the Novel." *The Encyclopedia of the Novel*. Ed. Paul E. Schellinger. Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998. Print.

Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President in Eulogy for the Honorable Reverend Clementa Pinckney." *The White House*. The White House, 26 June 2015. Web. 5 July 2015.

---. "Remarks by the President on the Supreme Court Decision on Marriage Equality." *The White House*. The White House, 26 June 2015. Web. 5 July 2015.

Parrish, Timothy. *From the Civil War to the Apocalypse: Postmodern History and American Fiction*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2008. Print.

Peek, Michelle. "A Subject of Sea and Salty Sediment: Diasporic Labor and Queer (Be)longing in Monique Troung's *The Book of Salt*." *The Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4.1 2012): 1-20. Print.

Quinn-Judge, Sophie. *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years 1919-1941*. Berkeley: U of California, P, 2002. Print.

Robinson, Alan. *Narrating the Past: Historiography, Memory and the Contemporary Novel.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.

Roth, Philip. *The Plot Against America.* New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. Print.

Rorty, Richard, ed. *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1967. Print.

Saint-Amour, Paul K. *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015. Print.

Saldívar, Ramón. "The Second Elevation of the Novel: Race, Form, and the Postrace Aesthetic in Contemporary Narrative." *Narrative* 21.1 (2013): 1-18. Print.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Introduction: Queerer than Fiction." *Studies in the Novel* 28.3 (1996): 277-80. Print.

---. "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is about You." *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003. 123-151. Print.

Seed, David. *Under the Shadow: The Atomic Bomb and Cold War Narratives*. Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 2013. Print.

Selzer, Linda. "Instruments More Perfect than Bodies: Romancing Uplift in Colson Whitehead's The Intuitionist." *African American Review* 43.1 (2009): 681-698. Print.

Shaw, Harry E. *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983. Print.

Sinfield, Alan. *On Sexuality and Power.* New York: Columbia UP, 2004. Print.

Smail, Daniel Lord. *On Deep History and the Brain*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 2008. Print.

Speri, Alice. "Half of America Thinks We Live in a Post-Racial Society—The Other Half, Not So Much." *Vice News*. Vice Media, 9 Dec. 2014. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.

Steele, Shelby. *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1990. Print.

Steffen, Will, et al. "The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 369 (2011): 842-867. Print.

Stein, Jordan Alexander. "American Literary History and Queer Temporalities." *American Literary History* 25.4 (2013): 855-869. Print.

Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. London: Weidenfelt and Nicolson, 1977. Print.

Touré. *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness: What It Means to Be Black Now*. New York: Free P, 2011. Print.

Traub, Valerie. "The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies." *PMLA* 128.1 (2013): 21-39. Print.

Troeung, Y-Dang. "'A Gift or a Theft Depends on Who Is Holding the Pen': Postcolonial Collaborative Autobiography and Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 56.1 (2010): 113-135. Print.

Truffaut, François. *Hitchcock*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984. Print.

Truong, Monique. *Bitter in the Mouth*. New York: Random House, 2010. Print.

---. *The Book of Salt*. 2003. New York: Mariner Books, 2004. Print.

Tucker, Jeffrey Allen. "'Verticality is Such a Risky Enterprise': The Literary and Paraliterary Antecedents of Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 43.1 (2010): 148-56. Print.

VanderMeer, Jeff. *Annihilation.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014. Print.

The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement. "About the Movement." *The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement*. The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement, n. d. Web. 12 Dec. 2014.

Warren, Kenneth W. *What Was African American Literature?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011. Print.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, U of California P, 1962. Print.

Watts, Jonathan. "Japan's hibakusha still battle the effects of US nuclear bombs." *Lancet* 356 (16 Sep. 2000): 1009. Print.

Weeks, Jeffrey. *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, From the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. London and New York: Quartet Books, 1977. Print.

West, Cornel. *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud: A Memoir*. Carlsbad, CA: Smiley Books, 2009. Print.

White, Hayden. "Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality." *Rethinking History* 9.2-3 (2005): 147-157. Print.

---. *Metahistory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973. Print.

---. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978. Print.

Whitehead, Colson. *The Intuitionist*. New York: Anchor Books, 1999. Print.

---. "Year of Living Postracially." Editorial. *New York Times*. New York Times, 3 Nov. 2009. Web. 15 Jan. 2015.

---. *Zone One.* New York: Anchor Books, 2011. Print.

Winterson, Jeanette. *The Stone Gods.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007. Print.

Xu, Wenying. *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian-American Literature*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2008. Print.

Yi-Sheng, Ng. "The Book of Salt: Monique Truong." *Fridae*. Fridae, 14 Nov. 2012. Web. 1 July 2014.

Zalasiewicz, Jan. "Are We Now Living in the Anthropocene?" *GSA Today* 18.2 (2008): 4-8. Print.

.